A Time Traveller’s Guide to

The Black Death
in Hampshire
through the Archives
The Black Death of 1348-50 was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history. The aftermath of the plague created a series of religious, social, and economic upheavals, which had profound effects on the course of European history.

The great plague announced itself in the midst of the Hundred Years' War, a series of conflicts which waged from 1337 to 1453 between the House of Plantagenet, rulers of the Kingdom of England, and the House of Valois for control of the French throne. It also coincided with a period of agrarian revolution and bad harvests which were already impacting on communities across Europe.

It is believed that the Black Death originated in or near China and spread by way of the Silk Road or by ship to various trading countries and may well have reduced the world’s population by 100 million by the year 1400.

It is generally acknowledged that the plague entered the south coast of England at the port of Weymouth in Dorset in 1348 and spread along the coast affecting Hampshire’s ports and their hinterland. Records such as bishops’ registers and manor court rolls held at Hampshire Archives throw light on the impact of the Black Death at this time as well as subsequent outbreaks.

Apart from the written records there are often physical clues to the abandonment of medieval settlements, such as the lone church in the middle of a field (although this could also be the result of later emparkment or sheep farming in Tudor times). Tell-tale lumps and bumps in and around an ‘abandoned’ church or chapel are also clues to what lay beneath the soil as house platforms and trackways reveal their ghostly outlines in dry hot weather.

The following guide illustrates some examples of the impact of the Black Death on parts of Hampshire through the records held at Hampshire Archives & Local Studies. Teachers can view the originals at the Record Office and use transcripts alongside copies to illustrate the Black Death at a local level.
Evidence for the Black Death in Hampshire

Evidence from the bishopric pipe rolls

The bishopric of Winchester estates was made up of 59 manors and six boroughs at the time of the Black Death in 1348-49. The pipe rolls or accounts of these estates make it possible to see the impact that the plague had on the bishop’s finances and the countryside within which he gained an income from rents etc.

The impact is seen most clearly in the defaults or arrears of rent alongside the costs relating to bringing in the harvest across his many manors. Below are extracts taken from the accounts for three of the bishop’s manors taken from the north, middle and south of the county of Hampshire showing the rentals and harvest costs for 1301-02 and 1409-10 which ‘sandwiched’ the plague years. Examine how they compare.

Above: part of the bishop’s pipe roll showing entries for Alresford Manor

**Alresford Manor**

1301-02: defaults in rents total £4.2s; total of remaining rents as income £35.6s.51/2d

1409-10: defaults at first pestilence (1348-49) £1.2s; defaults at second pestilence (1361) £8.19s.41/2d; total of defaults of rent (1409-10) £14.6s.41/2d Total remaining rents in income £26.8s
1301-02: cost of harvest – 4 boon works\(^1\) with 468 men who reaped 332 acres of wheat and oats total £1.13s.10d

1409-10: cost of harvest – 3 boon works with 156 men who reaped 137 acres of wheat, barley and oats plus 14 acres of pulses £4.19s.10d

**Fareham Manor**

1301-02: rent defaults £1.19s; total of remaining rents as income £28.6s.1d

1409-10: defaults at first pestilence (1348-49) none; defaults at second pestilence (1361) none; total of defaults of rent (1409-10) £1.18s.4d Total remaining rents in income £32.8s.11d

1301-02: cost of harvest – 3.5 boon works with 680 men who reaped 416 acres of wheat and oats total 13s.11d

1409-10: cost of harvest – 4 boon works with 272 men who reaped 170 acres of wheat, barley and oats 13s.8d

**Highclere Manor**

1301-02: defaults none; total of remaining rents as income £22.8s.11/2d

1409-10: defaults at first pestilence (1348-49) £1.5s.6d; defaults at second pestilence (1361) £2.10s.61/2d; total of defaults of rent (1409-10) £3.19s.6d; Total remaining rents in income £15.19s.6d

1301-02: cost of harvest – 1 boon work with 66 men who reaped 210 acres of wheat and oats total 13s.61/2d

1409-10: cost of harvest – no revenue from harvest as all land and stock given over in the hands of one farmer

**St Giles Fair, Winchester**

1301-02: tolls charged at gates into fair as income £4.11.6d; ground rents charged to stall holders at fair £34.9s.101/2d; expenses paid out £13.9s.21/2d

1409-10: tolls raised at gates into fair as income £0; ground rents charged to stall holders at fair £1.6s.21/2d; expenses paid out £11.5s.5d [many stalls stood empty]

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\(^1\) Generally, boon-work referred to the obligation of peasants to work a certain number of days each week for the lord they were dependent on, most commonly on his land (the demesne).
What evidence is there for the longer-term impact of the plague?

Evidence from W/A1/14, Charter of Henry VI, granting licence to the Mayor and citizens of Winchester to acquire lands worth £40 per annum to make good their losses resulting from the pestilence and the withdrawal of traders from the city. Written 12 Feb 1440 and given by the King's hand at Reading Abbey, 12 Feb 1439/1440 (18th year of Henry VI)

The charter recites that:

- 11 streets, 17 parish churches and 987 messuages (properties) have decayed in the past 50 years and that the city has become too impoverished to pay the fee farm (annual rent) of 100 marks, the sum of 60 shillings due to the Hospital of St Mary Magdalene and other charges.

Evidence from the 1416 Winchester tarrage W/E3/1 The tarrage was a Winchester term for terrage or ground rent (same as a fee farm rent) due to the King as Lord of the city. Two copies of the 1416 tarrage roll were made: one in Latin and one in English. It had been assessed for several centuries but the earliest surviving record is the tarrage roll of 1416. The Black Book of Winchester (held by The British Library) records a resolution of the Burghmote in 1416 to revise the tarrage and make a new assessment, presumably because the old assessment had become out of date after the ravages of the Black Death and other social and economic changes.

The tarrage rolls include those properties within the liberty of the city, excluding the area of the Soke outside the city walls, which came under the jurisdiction of Winchester College and the Cathedral. The liberty of the city was divided into six aldermanries: High Street, Jewry Street, Tanner (now Lower Brook) Street, Colebrook Street, Gold (now Southgate) Street and Northgate Street. Individual properties within these aldermanries are mentioned in the tarrage and the amount at which they were assessed is given. However, religious houses within the liberty of the city (eg Hyde Abbey, St Mary's Abbey) were exempt from the fee-farm rent and therefore excluded from the tarrage roll.

The tarrage shows that a number of properties had been consolidated into single units and there is mention of several properties having been lost or in decay. For example, “Here also must be viewed yearly the 2 tenements lately built by the city upon the decayed parsonage house of St Peters in Macellis”, “This is where the bakehouse stood”, “Note a void piece of ground at the end of Stratfford’s house”, “Upon these (5) parcels (of land) are now built the house that John Burte built and the garden there adjoining".
What was the impact on religious houses

Mottisfont Priory

Mottisfont Priory, a house of Austin Canons, was founded at the beginning of the 13th century. The quiet pastoral surroundings amidst which it was built, the stream (which supplied the monastic fish ponds) running through the grounds, the unfailing spring (fons) from which the place derived its name, have changed very little in the succeeding seven centuries.

The last half of the 14th century saw a marked decline in the prosperity of the Priory: this may be accounted for in part by the ravages of the Black Death, although the agricultural revolution and the general break-up of social conditions which marked the era following the pestilence were stronger factors of decay than the passing mortality. The Black Death is reckoned to have reached its height in Hampshire (where most of the Prior's property was situated) in the spring of 1349; the nuns of Romsey are known to have suffered severely and it is not likely that Mottisfont, so near a neighbour, escaped. A few years later Henry Duke of Lancaster, in order to help the Canons by stimulating the flow of the pilgrims - a ready means of improving conventual finances - obtained a special indulgence for a year and forty days for all those who visited Mottisfont Priory on Trinity Sunday or contributed to its upkeep.

The picture above shows a page from Mottisfont Priory rental, compiled originally between 1340 and 1342 but having entries as late as 1501. It was written on vellum
partly illuminated, bound in oak boards. At the foot of each page above you can see a mixture of what might be described as Christian and Pagan symbols, such as fish and dragons. If, as suspected, these are contemporary with the Black Death, do they tell us anything about the possible mind-set of the monk who created it?

The prior since 1343, Walter le Blunt, died in 1349 whereupon the sub-prior, Robert de Bromore, was elected prior. Prior Bromore himself died in 1351 and Richard de Caneford succeeded him. The Black Death was almost certainly responsible for the priors’ demise and by 1352 Caneford had also died. He was in turn succeeded by Ralp de Thorleston, a canon from Leicester, but he too had died by 1356.

There was another and independent estate in Mottisfont known as Mottisfont Treasury. The parish church at Mottisfont was older than and had never belonged to the Priory. Since before Domesday it had belonged to the Archbishopric of York together with land known as Mottisfont Treasury Manor. To encourage visitors to Mottisfont manor in 1351 the Treasurer of York Cathedral was granted a weekly market on Wednesdays and two annual fairs, at the beginning of May and at the end of November.

The fortunes of Mottisfont Priory continued to decline after the outbreaks of plague. In 1457 the then Prior wrote to Pope Calixtus III that as the result of "an earthquake and other disasters" which had recently visited the neighbourhood, his church and its surrounding buildings had been greatly crushed and loosened needing costly repairs, which he was unable to find funds for. The Pope (a copy of whose reply is still preserved at the Vatican) thereupon granted special relaxations and indulgences extending over a period of twenty years as an inducement for pilgrims to visit the Priory and give alms for the fabric and repair of the church.

Mottisfont manor with the Abbey centre from a map of 1724
Other religious institutions including the likes of Titchfield and Beaulieu were also affected by the series of plagues from 1349 which took many from their own orders along with their tenants, thereby making it difficult to continue financially and spiritually. Some, like Mottisfont recovered and thrived, whilst others like Titchfield barely kept going until they were dissolved by Henry VIII.

The priory of Monk Sherborne had also suffered neglect at the time of the plague of 1349 as well as the 100 Years War between England and France. Bishop Eddington’s register records on 8 June 1350, an ‘Appeal to the abbot and convent of St Vigor of Cerisy in the diocese of Bayeux (France). Their dependent priory of Monk Sherborne, at its foundation was well endowed with lands and buildings, through the negligence of superiors and of farmers or guardians during the wars with France, has reached such desolation and spiritual decline, with sterility of its lands, that the place is now destitute. To remedy the situation, with the consent of John de Sancto Philiberto, knight, the bishop proposes to reduce the brethren to eight persons with the prior; and to transfer four brothers to Cerisy for the time being’.

Further evidence for the Black Death from Bishop Eddington’s Register

Written at Southwark, London, 10 October 1348: Mandate for prayers to avert the Pestilence, addressed to the prior and chapter of the cathedral. Lamentation at the distress. The clergy are to appeal to the faithful for acts of penance; for the recitation of the seven penitential psalms and the fifteen gradual psalms on Sundays; for processions through the city, reciting the litany. Similar mandate to the archdeacon of Winchester or his official, to appeal to all grades of clergy and religious, that on Sundays and Wednesdays and Fridays they meet in the churches for the same penitential exercises. Similar mandate to the archdeacon of Surrey and his official.

Written at Southwark 17 November 1348: Provision for hearing confessions in reserved cases, addressed to the archdeacon of Winchester, on account of the pestilence, to be granted to all rectors, vicars and chaplains, who should encourage recourse to the sacrament of penance on account of unexpected death. Similar provision for confessors for the abbot and prior of Hyde and all priors within the diocese. Similar faculties to be granted to the two or three priests chosen by the abbess of Nunaminster, for reserved cases, lasting until Easter, and for all nuns of the diocese.

Written at Esher, 22 January 1349: with the present increasing mortality the bishop must provide for the needs of his flock. Knowing the prudence of Walter at Hulle, the bishop entrusts to him the custody and care of the vicarage of Wandsworth, now vacant by the death of John de Langdedon, until 1 February next.

Written at Esher 1 June 1349: letter from the bishop to Monsieur William de Coleton priest. Since all the brethren of the hospital of St Mary Magdalen of Sandon, now
vacant, have died during the mortality of England and that the hospital is now destitute after the death of its last warden or prior, father John de Askam, the bishop, to whom the custody devolves, sets Monsieur William over the hospital, the right of electing another warden in the future.

Above: a page from the late 14th-century Southwick Cartulary. Southwick Priory was originally founded during the 1120s at Portchester, but had moved to Southwick by early 1150. It was the second largest of the six Augustinian priories in Hampshire.

Written at Esher 27 February 1349: Admission of Henry de Guldeford priest to the vicarage of St Mary, Portchester, vacant by the death of Richard Baron last vicar, at the presentation of the prior and convent of Southwick, patrons.
How compliant were the laity and clergy at the time

Written at Esher 22 January 1349; Mandate to the cathedral prior, the abbot of Hyde and the official. The bodies of the dead lie in consecrated ground awaiting the resurrection. Nevertheless, the bishop has learned how wicked men have entered the cemetery at Winchester, assaulted father Ralph de Staunton when officiating at a funeral, and for their own profit removing the body to a place for animal refuse. And this at a time of great mortality, when cemeteries need to be enlarged. The faithful are to be instructed in this article of the faith; those who assaulted father Ralph are to be denounced as excommunicated.

The bishop received a brief from the king relating to The Ordinance of Labourers and Beggars which sought to make men who refused to work or demand high wages because of the plague to be put in prison until they agreed to work and be paid the rates as at 1346. The following order was sent to the clergy of Hampshire:

Written at Southwark, 25 June 1349; the bishop orders the clergy to publish the brief in the archdeaconry of Winchester, on Sundays and feast days when there is the greatest concourse of people, and in the vulgar tongue [English]; urging all rectors to encourage their people to work and keep the ordinances – and to control the avarice of certain chaplains in demanding higher salaries because of the lack of man-power through the plague; to appeal to them to be diligent in their service, to accept the customary stipend [payment] under threat of ecclesiastical censure.

Written at Southwark, 10 July 1350; Mandate, as from the archbishop of Canterbury, addressed to the two archdeacons, to compel parish priests to maintain the cure of souls. The clergy are not sufficient to permit any negligence. They are not to seek or demand excessive fees. They are not to retain chaplains unnecessarily, who are to be suitably paid.
Hyde Abbey (Winchester)

DC/A1/14 Letters patent of King Edward (III) addressed to the Abbot of Hyde (Hida) near Winchester and John de Hampton, Robert de Popham and William de Fyfhide 13 Feb 1349.

The King has been alarmed by a report from William, Bishop of Winchester [William Edington, Bishop 1345-1366]. Long ago, when King Henry (I), the King's ancestor, transferred the conventual church and abbey of Hyde from its site adjacent to the church of St Swithun, Winchester to the place where it now stands, he granted to God and the cathedral church of St Swithun's and the Bishop and his successors the old site (of Hyde) together with cemeteries and other adjoining enclosures, in compensation or exchange for the new site which the Bishop had conferred upon the said King for the building of the abbey (of Hyde), and in order that the (old) site which had been consecrated should not be given over to profane uses, as is clearly to be seen from the royal charters and other evidences shown to the King.

The Bishops (of Winchester) and the Prior of the said cathedral church have long held the said site, cemeteries and enclosures, divided by walls and other bounds from the King's city of Winchester. Now, however, certain men of the city, with the consent and at the command of the Mayor, Bailiffs and Commonalty of Winchester, breaching the said walls, ditches and enclosures, have entered the said consecrated ground, to carry out commerce in worldly goods, and as a result of these usurpations the Mayor, Bailiffs and citizens have decreed a market there twice a week and a fair twice a year, on their own authority.

When the monks and the Bishop's ministers attempted to prohibit these activities and to defend the right of their church, the citizens put up armed resistance, threatening to burn the priory and church and to kill any who opposed them. Not content with this, they have built chambers and walled enclosures on the said consecrated ground, and in the course of their digging and building have unearthed the bones of the faithful buried there which they have thrown into dreadful places, in contempt of God and the King, to the injury of the Bishop and the Prior and monks, and as an evil example in breach of ecclesiastical liberty.

Moreover, when the Bishop, because of the severe mortality during the late pestilence, seeing that the cemeteries of the city's churches were insufficient for the burial of the dead, decreed that the dead be buried in the aforesaid cemeteries of the Cathedral church, duly consecrated and blessed, the Mayor, Bailiffs and Commonalty of the city interfered with funeral processions, attacking and chasing off those who attended the bodies, and the monks, chaplains and clerks who had wanted to carry out the exequies for the dead, beating and often wounding them, and carrying off the dead or exhuming those bodies which had been buried there, and as a result of such armed gatherings committing various disturbances in breach
of the King's peace and the King's statutes for keeping the peace recognised throughout the realm.

Now, wishing to punish such crimes, the King appoints the said Abbot of Hyde, John, Robert and William, or two or more of them, to hold an enquiry, to determine the bounds of the site given by Henry I to the Cathedral church, to inspect the charters concerning the same, and to hear the sworn testimony of knights or whatever others of the county of Hampshire they may summon, in the presence of the Mayor, Bailiffs and certain of the citizens. They are to investigate the circumstances of the late disturbances and to determine, whether the old farm of the city should be reduced, and by how much, should the King decide to quash the citizens' market and fair. They are to send the findings of their enquiry to the King under their seals, so that the King, following discussion in council, may determine how to punish the said offences. The King has ordered the Sheriff of Hampshire to produce whatever witnesses the enquiry may request.
Examples from Bishop Eddington’s register of the later plague of 1361

Written at Southwark, 29 June 1361: Appeal to the king on behalf of poor benefices. Since certain parishes are depopulated since the pestilence and reduced to penury, so that they can hardly subsist the bishop appeals for reductions;

Church of Morestead 10s
Church of Ash 8s 8d
Church of West Dean 10s
Church of Swarraton 8s 8d
Church of Yarmouth, Isle of Wight 16d
Church of Doddington 16s 8d
Church of St Lawrence in Wath’ Isle of Wight 8s 8d
Vicar of Portsmouth 13s 4d
Church of Eastrop near Basingstoke 8s 8d
Church of Standen, Isle of Wight 4s 2d
Church of St James, Winchester, in pension 10s
Church of St Faith 10s 7d
Church of St Mary of the Vale 20s 21/2d
What evidence for the Black Death lies in the landscape

The case for Idsworth:

The chapel of St Hubert (formerly dedicated to St Peter and St Paul) is known as the little church in the field and was once surrounded by a medieval settlement.

A new priest was ordained in 1350, perhaps replacing a plague victim, but the settlement went into decline and was later emparked by new landowners who built a large house and park on high ground overlooking the church in the field (below).
In the Hampshire edition of The Buildings of England, the authors suggest that “Idsworth is not a village, but a wide stretch of downland on the Sussex border. The church stands alone in a field; the site of the old manor house is in a hollow below…and a great double avenue of lime trees climbing up a hillside to nowhere.” Of the church, St Huberts Chapel, they note that “It stood empty through the late c19 and so entirely escaped Victorian restoration.” Although sympathetically restored in 1912, its simplicity of layout and surviving fragments of medieval wall paintings evoke much of what it must have been like at the time of the Black Death when the surrounding settlement became desolated.

A survey of sites for potential deserted medieval villages made in 1968, many lost at the time of the Black Death, recorded 91 sites in Hampshire, with an additional 33 sites in the New Forest and 32 on the Isle of Wight. This equates to around 1 deserted village for every 15 square miles in Hampshire and 3 villages for every 15 square miles on the Isle of Wight.

One outcome of the great mortality resulting from the Black Death was a change in land transfer and rentals. Where a manorial lord survived the plague he might benefit from fines (called heriots) paid on the death of a tenant and on transfer of land, either within or between families or tenants. On the other hand, he might lose out if no-one took up rental on the land following the death of a tenant. Documents charting the transfer of land or gathering of rentals (other than the bishop’s pipe rolls above) illustrate the impact of the plague across Hampshire.

For example, the illustration on the following page shows part of a family tree of landowning in and around the manor of Cadland in the New Forest. Note the transfer dates; the later ones probably representing the aftermath of the plague of 1361. The manor of Cadland was a possession of the Abbey of Titchfield. Through court records it can be seen that disease was taking lives in the first half of 1348 climaxing in the Summer of 1349 with 83 deaths recorded in the Cadland court rolls.
The manor belonging to the Abbot, at Titchfield itself, reveals through its court records how the population of this small town and port was devastated by the outbreak of plague. There were about 150 tenants in total on the Abbot’s manor. The normal number of deaths per year amongst his tenants was around five deaths recorded at the courts for 1347 and first half of 1348. At the court held in October 1348 eight deaths were recorded followed a week later by 25 reported deaths in November. At the court held in March 1349, however, 106 deaths were reported – about two thirds or 60% of all tenants on the abbot’s manor. A total of 155 deaths occurred over the seven months between October 1348 and May 1349. That there were no deaths recorded at all in 1350 suggests that most if not all of the vulnerable tenants had perished during the plague period.

Above: Early map showing Titchfield Haven and manor