

# PLAGUE IN LEICESTER

## 1558—1665

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*From lightning and tempest, from plage, pestolence and famine, from battaile and murther, and from sodain death: Good lorde deliuer us.* Archbishop Cranmer's Litany of 1544,<sup>1</sup> illustrates well how, four centuries ago, people lived in daily fear of death without warning; theirs was a precarious life-span. A pre-occupation with death was further reflected in the elaborate arrangements made by testators of the pre-Reformation period in their wills regarding funeral rituals and the manner in which they provided for their souls' salvation after death.<sup>2</sup> The ritual changes of the Reformation altered most of this, but the constant fear of death remained, and plague cast the biggest shadow of all.

London, with a high and increasing density of population, was particularly vulnerable to epidemics, suffering at least seven severe plague outbreaks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not until after the well-documented and consequently better-known Great Plague of 1665, which was probably no more severe than earlier major epidemics in 1603 and 1625, was London completely free of the disease.<sup>3</sup> It is easily forgotten that, although plague was often more spectacular in its effects on London life, the capital was only one of many towns and villages throughout England that suffered disruption during epidemics. Plague at a local level, in its undulating course over more than a century in Leicester, is the more limited topic discussed in the following pages, and upon such local studies the national picture must ultimately be built.

Plague, carried by the bacillus *pasteurella pestis*, can be diagnosed from the swelling or buboes that affect the lymph glands, and occur most commonly in the groin, and to a lesser extent in the armpit, on the neck, and behind the ears. Usually one side of the body is affected. Death may occur through pneumonia or from cardiac failure, and there may be delirium preceding death. The more medical name is bubonic plague, but there are, in fact, at least three types of plague: bubonic, pneumonic and septicaemic.

Bubonic plague, as described above, is thought to be conveyed to humans only by bites from fleas associated with the black rat. In severe epidemics up to fifty per cent of cases die within five to six days. A victim of bubonic plague passes on the more deadly pneumonic plague, the most fatal of all infectious diseases, with a death rate as high as ninety per cent of cases. Death may ensue in a matter of hours, during coma or delirium, from cardiac paralysis, exhaustion, or most commonly from



haemorrhage of the lungs. Another form of plague is the septicaemic type, where the plague bacillus enters directly into the blood stream and poisons it, and causes the discolouring patches which are haemorrhages under the skin. It was this feature which caused the great outbreak of plague 1348-50 to be known as the Black Death, but this name was only given to it in the seventeenth century.

The form of plague found during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was chiefly bubonic, but in some of the later outbreaks it was associated with the pneumonic variety, resulting, as at Leicester in 1610-11, in a higher mortality. Greater economic distress was the inevitable consequence of pneumonic plague. Its immediate impact on the community was reflected not only in the number of deaths, but also in the sudden and prolonged disruption of day-to-day living. There is no evidence of septicaemic cases occurring in Leicester at this period.

A study of plague in Leicester between 1558 and 1665 must rely for basic material principally upon manuscript Parish Registers of the six parishes and the published Borough Records. St. Martin's Parish Registers start with the beginning of Elizabeth's reign; those for the next most important parishes of St. Mary-de-Castro and St. Margaret do not survive before 1600 and 1615 respectively; the other Parish Registers and their dates of commencement are: St. Nicholas, 1567; All Saints, 1571; and St. Leonard's, 1682. Nothing is known of Registers for St. Peter's, a parish permanently annexed to All Saints in 1591, although demolition of its parish church had started in 1555. Incomplete as the sources are, much can be learnt from them about the incidence of plague.

Between 1558 and 1665, Leicester suffered two major and several minor outbreaks of plague. The earlier major one, in 1593-4, was kept in reasonable check by stringent precautions and the closure of markets. As the Parish Registers did not record plague burials in these years, it is difficult to estimate the death roll caused purely by plague. From other evidence it seems to have been only about 150, but the town was impoverished, since it had to find funds to maintain the five or six hundred of its poor who, as a consequence of the preventative measures, were without means of support. The later more severe epidemic, preceded by a short outbreak in 1609, was in 1610-11. The markets were not closed, and the result of this plague, as estimated from burial entries in the Parish Registers, was a mortality exceeding 700, nearly three times the normal death rate for a two-year period. There was no marked drop in baptisms which, in the succeeding years, continued to average a total of about 135 annually, except, as might be expected, in St. Mary's Parish. In 1610 it had suffered worst of all with a mortality four-and-a-half times the normal annual parish burial figure of 28. Less serious plague epidemics occurred in about ten other years: 1558, 1564, 1579, 1583, 1603, 1607, 1623, 1626, 1636-39, but rarely did the death roll, as evidenced by Parish Registers, increase by more than half. Leicester's plague history ends remarkably when it escaped the widespread severe outbreaks of 1665, which affected many places in the county.



All figures of mortality must be seen in relation to estimates of the size of Leicester's population during the period under review, and to the normal death rate. Only then can the impact of plague be adequately assessed.

The Diocesan Returns of 1563 for Leicester<sup>4</sup> provide a useful breakdown of families per parish. Re-arranged according to size they are:

St. Margaret's	164
St. Martin's	160
St. Mary's	120
All Saints	66
St. Leonard's	32
St. Peter's	27
St. Nicholas'	22

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$$591 \times 5 = 2955$$


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It has generally been considered sufficient to multiply the number of families by five to produce an approximate population figure, but there are certain reservations with regard to this procedure. It is thought, and this is borne out by comparative figures for burials in the early seventeenth century, that St. Martin's parish contained more persons than did St. Margaret's. St. Martin's was the richest parish in the town, a fact shown both by the 1524 and 1544 Lay Subsidies and the 1670 Hearth Tax Returns, and the number of servants and apprentices would have increased the size of the average family in it. Recent research by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure provides evidence to suggest the average size of urban families at this date as approximately six-and-a-quarter.<sup>5</sup> If this figure is applied solely to St. Martin's parish, Leicester's estimated population is increased from 2,955 to 3,155 in 1563; in 1558 it would not have been much less. Leicester was still smaller than Oakham is today.<sup>6</sup>

At the close of the period under review, the Hearth Tax Returns for 1670 provide a reliable basis, and these show 1,024 households.<sup>7</sup> The average family size had fallen since Elizabethan days. On a figure of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  persons to a family,<sup>8</sup> Leicester's population would be 4,608. Again, allowing for an increased average family size in St. Martin's, though it was perhaps less pronounced than a century earlier, 4,850 would seem a reasonable estimate.<sup>9</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Leicester's population had increased between 1664 and 1670 (for example, the slightly incomplete 1664 Hearth Tax returns show a total of 892 families) and a figure of 4,400 in 1664 may not be too low. Leicester's population between 1558 and 1665 may then be thought to have increased by about a half, perhaps proportionally rather more rapidly between the years 1558 and 1600; in the latter year the population most probably was a little in excess of 3,500. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in urban communities, the death rate probably fluctuated between 30 and 35 per thousand population, whereas the live birth rate remained relatively constant around

30-32 per thousand. The years 1570 to 1600, in general, were healthy, with a high birth rate and a low death rate after 1580.<sup>10</sup> Between 1610 and 1665 deaths frequently exceeded births, resulting in a continuing net loss of population over successive years. In 1558, when this study of plague opens, Leicester's normal annual mortality, based on a minimum population estimate of 3,000, would have been between 90 and 105. If an attempt is made to look at this, parish by parish, the results would be as follows:

	<i>Estimated Population</i>	<i>Estimated Annual Death Roll</i>
St. Martin's	950	33 - 28
St. Margaret's	780	27 - 23
St. Mary's	570	20 - 17
All Saints	314	11 - 10
St. Leonard's	152	6 - 5
St. Peter's	129	4 - 4
St. Nicholas'	105	4 - 3
	<hr/> 3,000 <hr/>	<hr/> 105 - 90 <hr/>

With these statistical estimates, we may examine the plague years and the rates of mortality.

### 1558

The Parish Register of St. Martin's commences in November 1558, and shows 12 burials between 27 November and 21 December, and a further 28 between the ensuing 1 January and 31 March — if this had continued for a full year, a death roll nearly four times the normal would have been produced, yet the burial total for 1559 was only 57, barely twice the annual average for this parish. Although it is not known what the Parish Registers might have recorded prior to November 1558, the absence of specific mention in the Borough Records suggests this was a short-lived, localised outbreak of plague, lasting only two months. It is possible that the epidemic originated with the severe plague outbreak at Loughborough, where, from Midsummer 1558 to Midsummer 1559, "there were buried fourteen score and fifteen (295) of all sortes of Diseases and Sickness".<sup>11</sup> 249 deaths occurred there in the second half of 1558, with the outbreak at its height in August and September, in a town where the usual annual burial figure was just over 50.<sup>12</sup> The number of wills proved in the Leicester Archdeaconry provides evidence of the unhealthy state of the county at that time. The total increased from 105 in 1556 to 220 in 1557, and on to 420 in 1558. A fall to 180 in the next year was followed by a more normal figure of 86 in 1560.<sup>13</sup>



## 1564

1563 was a year of bad plague in London, with a maximum number of nearly two thousand burials a week in October. Among provincial towns affected in the following year were Leicester and Derby. Five deaths from "the peste" are noted in St. Martin's Parish Register between 11 May and 9 June 1564. Only three families were involved but before 3 June three members of the Bagalie (or Bagnall) family had succumbed, yet the number of burials (42) in the parish that year was only a third above the usual. The Corporation acted swiftly, and on 30 June produced "An Act agaynst them that are vysytt with the plague and will not kepe their houses . . ." <sup>14</sup> It was enacted that if any person dwelling within the town of Leicester should happen to be visited with the plague and presumed to go abroad among those that were clear, within two months after a death from plague had occurred in his house, that person would forfeit five pounds for each offence. If the offender was unable to pay, then he would lose the freedom of the town and be banished from it for ever. Wise men kept away from the town. The judges would not come on circuit to Leicester in July, <sup>15</sup> and there is a note in the Loughborough Registers, stating that the assizes were kept and held at Loughborough on 17 July because the plague was in Leicester.

Every plague outbreak involved the Corporation in making necessary disbursements to those confined to their houses because of the disease, and the 1564 outbreak was no exception, as the following payments contained in the Chamberlain's Accounts for 1563 - 4 illustrate: <sup>16</sup>

<i>Michael Nutt the thyrd day of Maye to buye meate for them that kept Stowton's house</i>	xxd.
<i>Richard Stowghton when his wief and child was buried</i>	iiis. iiid.
<i>Losebye's wief for keepinge Ellyn Marsholle's children when she was at Stowghton's house</i>	iiis. iiid.
<i>Bagnales wief when she was vysited with the plagge for the space of vij weekes</i>	vij s.
<i>Inglysshe's wief, of Anstye, for kepyng Kyrckame's house, beyng visited with the plague for x weeks at xvjd. a week.</i>	xij s. iiij d.
<i>Isabella Frere for the lyke for x weeks</i>	xs.
<i>Knytches children for the house of Will Durand</i>	xxiiij s.
(A total of 62s. 6d.)	

In the same year the Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Martin's <sup>17</sup> show a payment to "Thomas a lester for a booke of Prayers viij d."—most probably a copy of the Form ordered to be used every Wednesday and Friday during the time of the plague. A little later they paid 4d. for "a booke of Prayers being the Form of Thanksgiving to God set forth in 1564 for the ceasing of the Plague".



## 1579

In the immediate following years, there were no noteworthy features affecting mortality. Although burials were up by over a third in St. Martin's Parish in 1568 and 1569, the next evidence of a slight outbreak of plague was in 1579 when the Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight<sup>18</sup> were required to pay 12*d.* and 6*d.* each respectively "as often as nede shall require".<sup>19</sup> Three members of the Corporation were excused their payments because they had undertaken to keep William Shippen and his plague-infected household at their own expense.<sup>20</sup>

## 1583

Another minor outbreak, again not of epidemic proportions, occurred in 1583, when the Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight were again assessed on the same basis as they had been in 1579 and the commoners and inhabitants were to "bee taxed accordinge to their callings and habillities".<sup>21</sup> By 6 May, this taxation had been in force for three weeks and the assessment was "to contynue in force from three weekes to three weekes until hit please God to seasse the same".<sup>22</sup> Although the number of wills increased slightly, the burial rate in St. Martin's did not exceed the normal by more than a few deaths; 6 burials in September 1583 represented the worst month. In All Saints also parish burials were above normal.

## 1593 - 94

Ten years later, in 1593, Leicester suffered a prolonged, serious outbreak of plague, one of the two major epidemics already referred to. It was more costly in terms of money than of lives. Although accurate figures are lacking, this was probably the worst local epidemic for two centuries, yet the death roll was but a fraction of that in Leicester's Great Plague of 1610-11.<sup>23</sup> It was well advanced by the late summer. "The charge daily groweth greater and greater by reason of the infection of the plague or pestilence it heid pleased Almighty God to lay upon the town" wrote the mayor, John Stanford, to Sir George Hastings in mid-September 1593, "and the poor also daily increasing for want of their trafique and liberty to go abroad".<sup>24</sup> The weekly charge was more than £20 and the relief among the other poor who were forced to keep their houses was more than £10. A weekly assessment was requested "towards the better relief of the visited and the poor of the town".<sup>25</sup> This letter produced the desired result. The reply dated 20 September 1593, was signed by Sir George Hastings and three other county justices<sup>26</sup> at Market Bosworth, who said they had "this day taken order for the relief of your town by the support of the contrey". The pestilence being so dangerous, they desired that no one should enter the town from the country, nor any of the town go abroad into the country; and they heartily prayed that the holding of market assemblies should cease for some time, "as winter being at hand", they hoped it might "if it please God, occasion some staye of the sickness".<sup>27</sup>

On the same day instructions were issued to the head constables of the Hundreds explaining the present position and indicating that if the move-

ments of the inhabitants were to be restrained, the town would be impoverished. A charitable collection to be made weekly to relieve the poor was requested and it was urged that "the ministers and curates should move their parishioners to deal christianly and charitably with their neighbours as they would wish if themselves were in the like distress and misery, with more to the same effect".<sup>28</sup> The following day, at a Common Hall, the Twenty-Four were taxed two shillings each, and the Forty Eight one shilling each "now to begyn for the weeke paste, and so forwards".<sup>29</sup> By 19 October the commoners were to be taxed according to their "habillities".<sup>30</sup> Arrangements for day and night watch were made, each ward doing a seven-day stint on a rota basis. There was "strict charge for to kepe the watche trulye" and the night watch was instructed "not to departe before your daye watche do come".<sup>31</sup> The response was disappointing.

The only contribution received from the Hundreds by 15 October was eighteen shillings from Guthlaxton Hundred, which caused a further letter to be written to Sir George Hastings and the county justices asking that "somme reasonable weekly contrybucion maye bee collected towards the relyvinge of our said visited and poore people"<sup>32</sup> who must either live on alms or die in their houses. A personal sum of £20 was requested weekly from the Deputy Lord Lieutenant. On 19 October the mayor, by now Robert Herrick, wrote a strong letter to the High Sheriff, Thomas Cave, stating that the Corporation was in great debt and that unless better and speedier contributions were made, he would be forced "to move the lords of her Majesty's Privy Council for their warrant to the gentlemen of the county to the effect or else to set the poor at liberty for their better maintenance, with more to the same purpose".<sup>33</sup> The response was a little better.

On 4 November the Lord Lieutenant, the earl of Huntingdon, was requested to exert his influence with the county justices for a weekly allowance, since the position was becoming grave, as the following list of dead and infected houses at this date shows:<sup>34</sup>

<i>Dead</i>		<i>Dead</i>	
1 Peach's house	2	<i>Millstone Lane</i>	
2 Armeson's house	4	Trowell's house	3
3 Messenger's house	2	Messenger's house	5
4 Parker's house	1	<i>Southgate</i> — the east side	
5 Milner's house	0	Jarvis's house	2
6 Heywood's house	<i>visited</i>	One other of Messenger's	1
7 Taet's house	1	Jarman's house	<i>visited</i>
8 Valentine Cowper ( <i>dead</i> )	1	Taylor's house	1
9 Pinner's house	<i>visited</i>	In the land at the backside	
10 Armitage's house	2	of Sir Henry Harrington's	
11 Ransdale's house	2	house (which was in High	
12 Mr. Nix's house	1	Street)	
13 Charlock's house	1	Thomas Browne's house	3 and 1
14 Houghton's house	2		
Welchman's house	1	(Total	36)



In further support of the request, the mayor continues:

*"There ys dyvers sick in the said houses which be vizited and there ys dyvers howses hedged in and kept in that have mixt amongst the vizited people which are all releved daylye of the townes charges, and so must be untill wee have further tryall of them. Also we have greate number of poore, about some v or vi C (500 or 600) which are nowe all kept within the town and are not able to lyve without relief, expecting daylye some relief out of the countrey".<sup>35</sup>*

The suspected houses were to be watched day and night. All these visited houses appear to have been in St. Martin's and St. Mary's parishes, but there were also eight newly affected houses in St. Mary's not mentioned, which increased the total dead to 44.

The following warning was issued on 9 November:

*"Freemen contynewinge owte of the Towne shall paye for every weeke that they or any of them shall contynue oute afterwards xls. a weeke to the use of the vizited and poore people".<sup>36</sup>*

The mayor wrote in a letter dated 28 November to Thomas Skeffington and William Cave,

*"... it is increased in dyvers houses verye lately, so as at this tyme there ys at the least sixe and forty houses knowne to be infected with the said sickness, and some other houses doubted, which ... wee have caused to be kept in. And there is dead there of sythence the begynnynge persons young and old, fyve score and seven (107) at the least, which are all (saying three houses) kept and relyved with meate, dryncke, fyre, candle, water and keepers of the towne, of such monye as we have weeklye collected amongst ourselves and the inhabitants of our towne, being of any reasonable habillite, together with suche monye as we have receyved from the gentlemen of the countye. All which hath nothinge neere defrayed the daylye charges we have been att aboute the vizited people".<sup>37</sup>* All this led to an expectation that at least £16 weekly would be contributed out of the county.

In a further letter (4 December) the occupiers of three stricken houses were supporting themselves without becoming a charge on the town. The families concerned were those of Thomas Nix, John Freake and Robert Taylor. The last-named, a husbandman, consumed sheep and other things belonging to other people. He had only ten shillings in hand to pay off a three-figure debt. By this date poverty was increasing; the inhabitants had paid five pounds a week or more for ten weeks, and the charge of twenty watchmen, day and night, continuously since Michaelmas had been costly. On 7 December the mayor certified that he had received thirty shillings out of Sparkenhoe Hundred, but the sickness was "creeping still into new houses"; this conscientious mayor, Robert Herrick, had himself to borrow money on his own credit and was five pounds in debt.<sup>38</sup> He reported to the earl of Huntingdon that he had appointed a poor man to go through the country with a begging box. A month had elapsed since the letters to the county justices were delivered and under £20 had been collected "and that if it had not been for the great pains and care for them of good Sir Edward Hastings it would have been much less". A further



request for relief followed on 17 December, when £2 from "one denyzyon of Gartre hundrethe" is mentioned.<sup>39</sup> A similar amount from Francis Beaumont of Gracedieu, Justice of the Common Pleas, was acknowledged on 6 January 1594. Again, on 26 February "there hath been little done for the relief of the poor", the mayor complained to the earl of Huntingdon, "and yet our charge continueth great, and some houses lately infected towards the south end of the town, whereby I can hardly get the judges to sit at the castle". They were forced to lodge at Mr. Stanford's house, and to sit at the Town Hall.<sup>40</sup> This assiduous letter-writer addressed himself to Mr. Francis Gawdie,<sup>41</sup> and advised him that there was "a house newly infected at the furthest part of the South Gate of the town, there being one only dead out of the same, and two others dead out of two houses already infected, one in a back lane and the other in the way between Mr. Stanford's house and the castle".<sup>42</sup> The judges were accordingly recommended to sit elsewhere, and there was a charge of 15s. 6d. for "makinge ready of All Hallowes Church for the Judge to hold the assyses in, because the other parte of the towne was then infected with the sickness".<sup>43</sup> Strong watch was ordered to be kept during the assizes, but the plague had by this time subsided.

In summarising this outbreak the only figures that can be given are 44 dead out of 31 houses infected between August or early September and 9 November 1593, and a further 63 dead between 9 and 28 November. Plague deaths continued until February 1594. 219 wills were proved in the Leicester Archdeaconry in 1592, nearly twice the normal figure, and 152 the following year.<sup>44</sup> The Parish Registers of St. Martin's, All Saints and St. Nicholas are extant for this year, though the first two are severely defective. Very few burials are recorded, which suggests that victims of the plague were buried elsewhere, where is not known. Dead Lane<sup>45</sup> dates from the fourteenth century or earlier, but Deadman's Lane shown on some maps running from the Jewry Wall to Applegate may have received its name from this sixteenth-century outbreak of plague. The figures are not as great as the mayor's panic would suggest. Perhaps that was the reason for the county's limited response.

### 1603

The first decade of the seventeenth century must have seemed like a visitation. Throughout the county parishes between 1601 and 1603 there are many instances of minor epidemics; many people, it seems, were ill but most recovered; peak mortality was usually concentrated in a few months' period (*e.g.* Loughborough, February — April 1602 with 38 burials).<sup>46</sup>

Some sickness too brought fear of the plague to Leicester in the summer of 1603; there were but few deaths. A slight increase occurred in the burial rates in St. Martin's and All Saints. On 12 June Mr. Rowes, Master of the Trinity Hospital<sup>47</sup> in the Newarke, was rumoured to have died of the suspected plague,<sup>48</sup> but the earl of Shrewsbury was assured that the town was free of it. A Royal Progress of James I's Queen occurred on 23 June, but by 4 July the Twenty-Four had agreed to a levy



of 4*d.* each weekly on themselves and half this amount on the Forty-Eight; the best commoners in each ward were required to pay 1*d.* each weekly. The object was to relieve those who had to keep their houses or were sick in the town's gaol.<sup>49</sup> Payments included 7*s.* 6*d.* for 15 cwt. of coal.<sup>50</sup> A man from plague-stricken Stamford was turned out of Leicester, and watchmen were "set at the townes endes to looke that no vizited people should come into the town".<sup>51</sup> On 17 January 1604 a suspected house "in the Northe gate in the occupacion of John Turner" caused the Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight only to be taxed as before.<sup>52</sup> The number of burials this year were only slightly above normal. Other parts of the county had their worries: Melton market was closed to villagers of Ashwell and Teigh on account of the plague, and the village of Marston Trussell, just in Northamptonshire, saw 31 burials. In the same year, there was a severe outbreak at the Warwickshire village of Clifton-on-Dunsmore, a few miles from the Leicestershire border, where 78 burials occurred between May and August, half of them in three and a half weeks, from 30 May to 24 June.<sup>53</sup>

## 1607

There were several small payments on account of plague in 1606-7, in part offset by another taxation which produced 3*s.* 3*d.* The entries included one shilling paid to two women, "appoynted to serche Henry Stanford's daughter, who departed at Mr. Nixes howsse,<sup>54</sup> wheyther it weare the sickness or not".<sup>55</sup> Further payments were for a day's watch on the "visited" houses and for setting crosses on the doors of the same. The Corporation sent Thomas Stapleford to Bourne in Lincolnshire to arrange for Mr. William Mote, a physician, to come over to Leicester, but he had been called to Uppingham.<sup>56</sup>

There were 4 deaths from plague in St. Mary's Parish in October-November 1607 and the Chamberlains' accounts for 1607/8 show plague disbursements of £8 3*s.* 7*d.* with taxation only bringing in £3 8*s.* 9*d.*<sup>57</sup> Reference is made to a "booke of the particular charges". The following year there was a charge for thirty hurdles "to hurdell in the howses vizited with the sickness called the plague in Leicester" 3*s.* 3*d.* was paid to "Michael Tyars to keepe him, being sick, att which tyme it was feared to be the plague but was not".<sup>58</sup>

## 1609 - 11

The summer of 1609 brought widespread plague throughout the county and for long afterwards reference was made to this year as the "Sickness time". On 2 October 1609 the Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight were taxed at three shillings and eighteen pence apiece respectively, and the "Comyners accordinge to theire Abillities Sessed for one monethes paye, from this present daie for and towards the Reliefe of the visited People".<sup>59</sup> This produced £14 13*s.* 10*d.* Further evidence of the expenditure incurred in connection with plague this year is provided by the Chamberlains' Accounts for 1609-10<sup>60</sup> which include payments:



*"to Bowett Croft for hurdells to hurdell in the vizited people and their howses to be knowene from others in the towne 6s. 4d.*

*"for the charges and horsshier of Roger Hawfeilde to Mr. Recorders for his comynge to the election of the newe Maior on Saincte Mathewes daie whoe by reason of the sickness, called the Plague in Leicester, then would not come 5s.*

There is a similar entry for 4s. 6d. the following year.

Later references suggest the visitation affected the South Gate district. This is borne out by Plague burials in St. Mary's Registers between February and October; 14 are so described, yet the annual death rate was only slightly up. All Saints was also affected; 13 plague burials are marked between September and November.

Meanwhile, at Loughborough, plague raged from 24 August 1609 to 19 February 1611, the death toll being 452 (366 stated to be from plague), and the whole town was much impoverished. And at Coston, with a normal annual rate of eight burials, 49 died between April and July 1610. Wigston had twice its normal number of deaths when 34 died in an eleven-week period from 1 August to 18 October 1609. At Bottesford, the plague had commenced on 26 February 1610 and within the next year 107 were dead — six times the normal annual rate.

Leicester suffered more or less continuously from plague in 1610 and 1611, but the markets were not closed, as had been the case in the 1593 epidemic. In both 1610 and 1611 the Assizes were held at Hinckley. Dr. Pottle,<sup>61</sup> "Batchelor in Physiche", was recommended to the Corporation by the President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, to investigate Leicester's plague.

The parish of St. Mary-de-Castro seems to have had the first plague death of this major outbreak, on 15 March 1610. Only with the summer heat did the position become worrying. "Since the begynnynge of June last", the earl of Huntingdon was informed, "*itt ath pleased Almightye God to vizite our poore town of Leicester with the heavie sickness of the plague in manie houses, and without the Sowthegate, eithence which tyme the saide sickness is dyspearst into severall parts within the saide towne, to the greate charge and feare of the inhabitants there; the most of which vizited people have been verie poore, and not able to relieve themselves and famylies*";<sup>62</sup> the usual request for funds follows. Throughout the epidemic, the Parish Registers of the town record burials, which suggests that the churchyards were not closed, and the pitiful story of families decimated or wiped out cannot be concealed. The family of Thomas Cademan in St. Mary's parish can be taken as typical. His wife died on 9 July 1610, Thomas himself on 27 July. Three sons followed them to the grave on 8, 9 and 12 August. The plague was at its height in St. Mary's during August, with almost a burial a day: Thomas Phrane lost his wife, three sons and two daughters between 14 August and 5 September. Young couples were cut off before they had a chance to raise a family. William Pollard had married Ellen Ridgley at St. Mary's on 22 January 1610, both died during August that year.



Matters became serious in St. Martin's during September. The Fletcher and Best families were among the first affected, and a bride of two months, Isabel Fletcher (née Best), was one of the first to go. St. Martin's Register marks after an entry for 12 August *The Sickness began Plague (sic)*. In the early weeks the Slater family lost five members, the Rudds three (in ten days). From 31 August licence of removal was required for Freemen wishing to dwell out of the borough upon pain of forfeiting twenty shillings weekly. Thomas Peale, constable of the South Gate, was to have 13s. 4d. for every month the said Street or gate had been "visited".<sup>63</sup> There had been 26 deaths, all but one from plague, in St. Mary's parish during August. In September 15 were recorded, compared with 21 in St. Martin's. Things eased a little in October (St. Martin's 14, St. Mary's 11), but became bad again in St. Mary's during November, with 24 burials (22 suspected plague). Bartholomew Bonde lost a son and two daughters on 9 and 10 November, two further sons on 20 and 22 November, and he himself was buried on 23 November. The family of Ralph Wilkinson (two parents, two sons and two daughters) was wiped out between 25 November and 18 December. St. Martin's showed a slightly better trend with only 12 burials in November and a normal December with only 3 burials. St. Mary's recorded 12 plague burials in December.

Meanwhile, on 4 November, the mayor, John Mabbes,<sup>64</sup> had not taken kindly to the suggestion that the markets should be closed: "*our Towne is not soe muche infected As gives just cause to forbid our Markitt to bee kepte, For blessed be God the wholl markitt-place is cleere from Mistress Pilkingtons howse to the East Gate, and not one howse infected nor suspected and without the East Gate, all Belgrave gate on both sides and Galtrie Gate, where the Angell standeth there ys onlie one house infected, and one howse suspected*".<sup>65</sup> A prompt, if verbose, reply from the earl of Huntingdon did not insist on market closure, but as a precaution, the fair held on 8 December for all kinds of merchandise, instead of being held with that for beasts and horses, between St. Sunday's Bridge<sup>66</sup> and the further end of the South Gate was, by proclamation, held in the Saturday Market,<sup>67</sup> "for the good of the wholl Countie and for all Comers to the said faior".<sup>68</sup> The Beast Fair was to be kept in the Northgate, and the Horse Fair in Gallowtree Gate.

With such mortality, the town's expenditure on plague relief remained at a high level, and on 27 December the Corporation advised the earl of Huntingdon that their New Year gift was "not soe great as heretofore . . . as the Towne hath been att such extraordinarye charge about the vysited people *viz.* the plague this yeare and soe continueth".<sup>69</sup>

The year 1611 was to bring little comfort. The plague had subsided during the winter months, the worst features being 12 burials in St. Martin's in February 1611, and 9 deaths (7 from plague) in St. Mary's the following month. In St. Nicholas's parish seven with the name of Stanford had died between 17 December 1610 and 20 April 1611. On 31 March the houses currently infected numbered 16 and, as the disease intensified again, four further houses were affected in the succeeding



fortnight. During April 20 plague deaths were recorded in the parish of St. Mary's and 15 in St. Martin's.

An indication of the expenditure which this prolonged outbreak of plague had already caused may be gained from the Taxation details of 31 March 1611. These showed that in the preceding eighteen months, plague relief had totalled £306 2s. 2d.<sup>70</sup> and included in this amount was £220, produced by nine separate taxations. A further £30 had been paid by the Chamberlains "out of their owne monye", and a pest house had also had to be provided.<sup>71</sup> The worst affected areas were the pest house near the Blackfriars; six houses near the West Gate; St. Mary's Close; two houses in St. Martin's churchyard; one house near St. Nicholas's church; one house near the High Cross; the Hermitage House, at the end of the South Gate; one in the "back lanes",<sup>72</sup> and Mr. Thomas Sacheverell's house near the New (or Wyggeston's) Hospital, of which he was Confrater. By the end of April, the plague had spread to a house in Gallowtree Gate, two in the Saturday Market, two in Red Cross Street, three in Millstone Lane and one in Sanvey Gate.

Meanwhile, by 12 April, the weekly charge for providing plague relief had increased from £3 to £4, and although this was below the peak of £8 reached the previous year, the county justices, on 17 April, addressed an order to the various constables of the villages which lay within five miles of the town for weekly contributions, which produced a total of £163 15s. 6d. during the period the order was in force. Some of the places concerned with their weekly assessments totalling £2 2s. 0d. were:<sup>73</sup>

Aylestone	2s.	Stoughton	2s.
Blaby	2s.	Evington	2s.
Whetstone	2s.	Humberstone	2s.
Wigston	2s.	Belgrave	2s.
Foxton	1s. 6d.	Knighton	2s.
Oadby	2s.	Wistow	2s.
Countesthorpe	2s.	Scraptoft	2s.
Glen Parva	1s. 6d.	Burton Overy	2s.
Kilby	2s.	Bushby	1s. 8d.
Stretton Magna	2s.	Thurnby	1s. 8d.
Stretton Parva	1s. 8d.	Houghton	2s.

The approach of summer brought a renewed fear that the worst was yet to come. During May St. Martin's saw 17 burials compared with 10 (9 from plague) in St. Mary's. Although things were to improve in St. Mary's parish, in St. Martin's parish during June and July 49 were buried (15 marked "plague"), including six on a single day, and the epidemic became acute in July in the parish of All Saints. On 23 May "Your assured loving friends" had reported to the Recorder that "*the sickness hath of late increased, and that indeed verie muche in the neyther end of Belgrave Gate, . . . outside of our towne, and, God be thanked, somewhat stayeth in the rest of the town, beinge of speciall use for the faires and marketts, and assizes and sessions . . . first for Belgrave Gate, there is no house infected*



*above Mr. Yates . . . and especially that street towards the castle, where the judges use to lie, there is no sickness at all . . . There is not in all the street which leadeth north and southe thorowe our town, which is above a mile longe (in which the judges do usuallie lie), any one house infected that openeth in to the same streete".<sup>74</sup>*

Ten days later, the Corporation certified again that "*in Belgrave Gate there is some increase, yet, God be prayed, we thinke and assure ourselves in generall the same doeth rather decrease than otherwise, for that there died of the sickness the last week xix, and this week but xj; and the wholl streete betwene the East gate and the hie Crosse stands sound and cleave, and allsoe the wholl streete about the judges lodging and from thence to the Castle stands free and cleire, save onlie one howse towards the neyther end of the streete between their Lodging and the Castle which is standing on the lefte hand as the judges ride thence to ye Castle".<sup>75</sup>* The letter went on to state the north part of the town was clear, and only one inn and four victualling houses of small resort had been visited. All this failed to convince the Judges, and Leicester had to do without the trade the Assizes would have brought.

On 3 June 1611 an angry letter was sent to Market Harborough, which wanted the signature of Dr. Chippendale<sup>76</sup> certifying that Leicester was clear of plague. The Corporation was indignant at the thought that "his insight into the state of Leicester for the sickness of the plague is clearer than ours, which are daielie over them". Legal proceedings were threatened, if use of markets was refused. On 13 June wine, sugar and cherries were sent to Mr. Walter Hastings at London "whoe went to the Judges to moave them to holde the Assizes att Leicester",<sup>77</sup> but despite his efforts and those of the town clerk, who went to Bosworth and Oakham, the judges sat, as arranged, at Hinckley.

The next report on the progress of the plague's ravages is contained in a letter from the mayor and aldermen to the High Sheriff, Sir Thomas Beaumont, on 18 June; it shows 26 houses infected in Belgrave Gate, "*in the neyther end thereof, towards the Spittelhouse".<sup>78</sup>* In Gallowtree Gate there was one house infected, with one death and one suspected of being infected. Mr. Chamberlain's was the only house infected in High Street. The market place was clear except for Paines which had been shut up two months, although there was no person sick there. In Loseby Lane and the street near St. Martin's Church<sup>79</sup> there were six infected houses, though only one person was currently sick. Between St. Sunday's Bridge and the South Gate, "*not anie house infected nor suspected".<sup>80</sup>* St. Mary's Close and St. Nicholas were clear and only one house infected in Red Cross Street. One had died within the last week at the Old Hospital, which was previously clear, but only a "suspected" case. Since the previous date, two more victualling houses were infected. There were 48 burials during July and August in All Saints parish; at the height of this epidemic there were 22 burials between 28 July and 3 August. During these months, the name *Baker* appears seven times and that of *Brown* five times. Deaths fell to 15 in St. Martin's in August, but in the small



parish of St. Nicholas the peak was reached between 5 and 25 August when there were 11 burials. John Parsons and his wife Elizabeth, together with a son and two daughters, died within the space of a month. After August, the intensity of the plague lessened, and things slowly returned to normal.

The total death roll in the town during 1610 and 1611 exceeded 700. The tables in Appendix I contain further particulars of the parish mortality during this epidemic. The entry in the Parish Register of All Saints stating that from Lady Day 1611 to Lady Day 1612 there died above 600 in the town must accordingly be qualified. St. Margaret's extant Registers do not commence until 1615, and none survive for St. Leonard's,<sup>81</sup> though it seems unlikely that the former parish suffered to the same extent as St. Mary's and St. Martin's, whilst St. Leonard's parish, then sparsely populated, was relatively unimportant. In each of those four parishes for which there are records, the number of burials over the two-year period was consistently two to three-and-a-half times the average of the period, figures that most probably under-state the true position, since those who died in pest houses are unlikely to have been buried in churchyards. One pest house was erected in a garden in the parish of St. Nicholas, at the Water Leggs (near present-day Bath Lane). The tenant's interest in what was normally a private dwelling was bought out for ten pounds; pitch-board and other timber was used in partitioning it off, as also happened at Trinity Hospital in the Newarke. The Water Leggs pest house was later returned to normal occupation, for in the 1612/13 Accounts there appears a receipt of 6s. 8d. from Richard Awman, butcher, for the pest house and garden in his occupation at will.<sup>82</sup> Other pest houses were the Spittal-house in Belgrave Road, and the Hermitage House near what is now Infirmary Square.

Hurdles, stakes and cord, "to sett at the dores of the vizited howses to be known from other houses in ye town", are mentioned in the records as are "boults for the watchmen to shewte att the vizited people, such persons as would not be kept in their howses". Any who contemptuously ventured out, were to "be taken deemed and adjudged as a felon, and to suffer the pains of death".<sup>83</sup> Some evidence that the town may have been considerably disrupted for some months after the cessation of the plague might be provided by the number of wills proved at Leicester. These did not reach a peak until 1613 when 190 were proved compared with 160 the year before and nearly a half as much again as the annual average.

Sometime during this severe outbreak, Lutterworth complained bitterly to Leicester about the laxity in letting its inhabitants "straggle abroad to the herte" of its neighbours. John Yorke was found in Lutterworth suffering "of the plague, yt rose in his gryne",<sup>84</sup> and being from Leicester he was put out to return, but died in the fields.

When the epidemic had subsided, the Corporation, in March 1612, wrote to the Recorder deploring the decision by the judges on this circuit to remove their lodgings to Mr. Wadland's house (formerly Sir Thomas Beaumont's) in the Newarke, "a thing much desired to the



contrary by our inn-keepers, victuallers, and tradesmen, in respect of their great losses recently sustained by the plague".<sup>85</sup>

One Leicester person, at least, had reason to be grateful for the plague. Humphrey Dawes, a sievemaking, sometime of St. Nicholas parish, was brought before Sir Humphrey Orme in Peterborough "for being married to a second wife, his first being living". Sir Humphrey wrote to the Mayor of Leicester on 13 April 1612 asking for certification "whether Dawes' wyfe be living or dead, and the tyme of her death". The Mayor replied that Agnes, wife of Humphrey Dawes had died in the parish of St. Nicholas "on 12 August last of the sickness called the plague", and was buried "as by the register of the said parish dothe appeyre".<sup>86</sup> Parish Registers had their use!

On 27 June 1614 the town was declared "free and cleare from anye such danngerous deseases" for the King's visit.<sup>87</sup> Although two persons died in the county gaol that year suspected of the pestilence, 1613 and 1614 were years of low mortality.

Deaths were up by half in 1615, but the Parish Registers of All Saints refer to "a burning Fever in every parish so that there died many thereof... This yeare also there was such a drought in somer that it caused a great scarcity of many things". The winter before had seen the "great snow" which began about the beginning of February and continued on the ground until the later end of March "to the horror of all people and the death of many cattell". The burial total of 30 in All Saints' parish included 24 between 4 June and 29 December. St. Martin's recorded 10 burials in February and 8 each in January and May, yet the annual total reached only 59. St. Margaret's registers do not start till June, but record peak months in September (10), August and October (9 each), and November (8). It would be rash to consider these as resulting from plague.

St. Mary's Registers continued to record a small number of plague burials every year from 1613-1623 (with the exception of 1616), but it seems the definition of "plague" may have been loosely interpreted.

The number of wills proved at Leicester in 1617 soared to 217, nearly twice the normal rather more than after the plague years of 1610-11, but the Parish Registers in Leicester disclose only normal death rates, suggesting it was the county that was unhealthy. There was a minor outbreak of plague in Loughborough in April, May and September 1617. In succeeding years too, many parishes in the county had recurring epidemics, for example, at South Kilworth in 1621, 21 out of 27 burials occurred during April and May. Loughborough had a short attack in March and April that same year.

#### 1623

Plague was brought into Leicester in 1623, but the usual precautions prevented an epidemic. Plague burials in St. Mary's parish totalled 10 during the year, followed by a further 6 deaths from plague in January 1624. On 1 June 1625 Ashby-de-la-Zouch feared that rumours of a serious outbreak there would keep great numbers from its markets and fairs. During the previous three months there had been not more than fifteen deaths (six



not of plague), and a learned doctor regarded it as "burning fever".<sup>88</sup> In Leicester, a watch was kept from 9 July to 24 September to keep Londoners out of the town, the watchmen being paid four shillings each week. Michael Green was paid 6s. 4d. "for openinge and shuttinge the double gates" for nineteen weeks.<sup>89</sup> On 11 July, William Symson and John Henshaw, common "caryers" to London "in regard of the great and present danger of the Infecion of the Plague" were not to receive wares from London nor to convey goods or passengers to that place until further notice.<sup>90</sup> Four shillings was "paid to Simpson the carier for his losse in butter when he would have carried it to London".<sup>91</sup> There was worry about "the heat of the weather and the daunger of the tyme". The pest houses were to be made ready, and on 25 July it was agreed that "the Wednesday exercise of fasting, praying and preaching, be held at every severall parish church" within the borough.<sup>92</sup> Between 19 September and 12 November 1625, payments to "poore people to pass them through the town", totalled £16 4s. 9d. Two members of the Forty-Eight disobeyed the mayor for sending to or receiving wares from London. Both were bound over. The poor summer of 1625 evidently assisted in restricting the onset of plague, but 1626 was a bad year in many parts of the county.

#### 1626

At Hinckley the visitation commenced on 22 May, and six members of the Burton family were dead before 7 June. 79 were buried in August, including the parents and no fewer than nine children of the Kirtleton family. The 143 burials that year probably represented a death roll of one in six. At Blaby 82 were buried between April and August, the annual death roll did not exceed ten in a normal year. The summer was dry and hot, and the position in Leicester can be summarised by a letter dated 16 July to the Justices of Assize at Market Harborough which stated that in Leicester's six parishes there had not died since 26 May (the first suspected plague burial) above 44 of all classes out of 3,000 communicants, of which 13 had died of plague and those in six houses which were "in Backe lanes and remoate places and not in the harte of the Towne" nor near the Justices' lodgings.<sup>93</sup> Those in danger had been sent to one of the four pest houses then in use. On 28 July 1626 the Muster in the county was respited because Leicester and nine or ten other towns were visited with the plague.<sup>94</sup> In the Registers of St. Mary's parish, eleven plague burials are marked between 4 September and 20 November. Only five families appear to have been involved. In one of these, William Jeffery and his three sons died between 20 September and 14 October. May, July and September were bad in St. Margaret's and All Saints and the death roll was double the normal in several parishes. A full analysis is set out in Appendix II. A total of £40 3s. 4d. was "payed for the dayely reliefe of the visited people in the Soar Lane, at the North Gate, Red Crose, and St. Maries Close".<sup>95</sup> Interesting items in the Accounts include the following:<sup>96</sup>



"Payed for searchinge of 41 dead corpes	£1 os. 4d.
"Payed to Atkins for killinge of tenn doggs	1s. 8d.
"Payed for a spade to burie the visited people in Maries Close	1s. 2d.
"Paid for a coffin for the same purpose	5s. od.

From the above, it seems that one coffin had to serve to transport the corpses to the graveside. The part of St. Mary's Close referred to for burial was probably Castle View.<sup>97</sup> The number of wills proved at Leicester in 1626-27 showed an increase of nearly 50 per cent over the normal annual figure.

The following years provided no evident plague features, until 20 April 1631, when the rector of Loughborough and others wrote to the Corporation of Leicester to dispel rumours of dangerous plague in Loughborough. They reported eleven deaths by plague in seven weeks, with only three houses infected. Leicester, unconvinced, set a watch to prevent inhabitants of Loughborough from entering "eyther to the markett or otherwise".<sup>98</sup> Things evidently became worse in Loughborough, which had 90 deaths between August and November and on 12 November, Leicester sent £10 for its relief.<sup>99</sup>

The number of wills proved at Leicester was above average throughout the period 1632-41, reaching a peak in 1638, yet only occasionally did parish registers reflect a month of heavy mortality. (e.g. St. Mary's 10 in March 1632, St. Margaret's 10 in August 1632, and St. Martin's 11 in October 1634).

#### 1636 - 39

In 1636 there was real fear and apprehension in Leicester with plague threatening; watches were kept at St. James' Chapel, Horsefair Leys, the Bear Hill Cross, Gallowtree-gate End, the Spittal-house, the Cow Pasture Gate, St. Sunday's Bridge and the West Bridge. There was to be one warder at each place from sunrise until nine o'clock at night.<sup>100</sup> On the same day, 15 August, the common carriers to London were suppressed, and no housekeeper was to receive any stranger without the knowledge of the mayor or aldermen of the ward. By 30 August a night watch had been appointed, and one constable was to walk abroad all night to oversee and to ensure that the night watch waited for their day relief. One of the companies of the Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight, beginning with the "auncientest" was to walk about all day and oversee the day watch.<sup>101</sup> The watch cost £18 8s. od. from 2 October to 23 December 1636, and a second watch from 12 April to 30 December 1637 cost £23 6s. od. On 24 December 1636 Daniel Morris "for want of suerties for the good behaviour for his miscarriage in concealing the sicknes within his house" was committed to gaol and "suppressed from victualling", and it was ordered that his sign be taken down.<sup>102</sup> By 1639 the pest-houses were again in use; Mr. Chamberlain Peake laid out £30 for the building of a new pest house, and plague charges produced a deficit of £64 19s. od. It is perhaps not surprising that distress warrants were issued against several ratepayers in arrears with their contributions. Two of these seven



defaulters — John Tatam and John Ludlam, owing 4s. and 3s. 3d. respectively — were members of the Corporation.<sup>103</sup>

On 11 January 1639 an order was made "for the cleansing of the streets" to be put into effect;<sup>104</sup> up to 2 February there were 41 persons dead and 17 infected houses. After a hot, dry summer, burials were appreciably up in St. Margaret's and St. Martin's, there being 35 burials between October and December 1639 in the former parish, when a death roll of 79 was recorded. For St. Martin's the following year burials doubled to 77 largely due to 13 deaths in October and 12 in November. St. Margaret's burials totalled 59 (and remained high in 1640). In 1638-39 over 400 deaths occurred in Leicester — about one and a half times the normal rate.

Leicester's anxieties tend to overshadow the terrible plight of Melton Mowbray in 1637. There had been an abnormal number of deaths, 120, the previous year, with August to December accounting for 65. This faded into insignificance after May and June 1637 had accounted for over 240 of the year's total of 343. On 25 May there had been 10 burials, and between 21 and 26 June, 44. In that one year Melton lost a third of her inhabitants. Leicester sent £10 to relieve distress. In the sixteen-forties Market Harborough had 17 plague deaths in 1641 and 10 in 1645; Loughborough had 22 in 1645 and 1646, but 83 between 20 July 1647 and 25 March 1648. Leicester sent £10 relief during this last occurrence and kept a watch to prevent people from Loughborough entering the town.<sup>105</sup>

Leicester seems to have escaped these disruptions, but with sickness in Thurmaston, Birstall, Whetstone (six visited houses and some suspected) and Oakham, a continual watch, costing £46 8s. 7d. was kept in 1641;<sup>106</sup> a petition dated 11 January 1642 from Whetstone, which had six visited houses showed that the place had 140 knitters dependent on Leicester, who did not want to be deprived of their livelihood on account of plague.<sup>107</sup> During the 1640s local registers are defective, but 60 burials were recorded in St Martin's in 1642. Again Leicester swiftly paid several sick persons to remove themselves from the town.<sup>108</sup> Deaths continued at a high level throughout the next two decades, but this was a period of general ill-health and there was no confirmed plague outbreak.<sup>109</sup>

### 1665

1665 was the year of the Great Plague in London, which despite its name was only slightly more severe than earlier serious outbreaks in 1603 and 1625. Leicester took the strongest precautions to keep Londoners out, since the hot June weather made the likelihood of plague breaking out a constant threat. On 28 July the common carriers were warned that if they went to London, they were to provide lodgings and places to air their goods outside the town.<sup>110</sup> The tenants were turned out of the pest-houses. With epidemics in many towns and villages, Leicester was fortunate, for in the south of the county, people fleeing from London brought plague to Kibworth, and at Skeffington the inhabitants fled to the woods in an effort to escape a severe outbreak that threatened to wipe

out the village.<sup>111</sup> In north Leicestershire, one of the places to suffer was Melton Mowbray and Leicester sent £10 relief. Double gates were put up at the town's entrances and a constant day-and-night watch kept. The watchmen were paid weekly at 8*d.* each per day. Huts and rails were provided and set up at the charge and out of the town stock for keeping out infectious persons and relieving other passengers necessitated lodging and maintenance.<sup>112</sup> These efforts were rewarded and Leicester escaped the plague that killed nearly 70,000 in London. Only St. Martin's with a twice the normal death roll showed any appreciable increase in the burial rate. The mayor of that year, William Callis, was an apothecary, and may have foreseen the need for preventative measures, which the Corporation, by prompt action, was able to effect before the infection reached the town. By the end of September, the danger had passed, and the relief can almost be sensed in the following extract from the Chamberlain's Accounts:<sup>113</sup>

"Paid to Thomas Darbye, for taking up the posts and rails at Barkby Lane end and laying up the same — viij*d.*"

Leicester must also have been thankful that Belgrave Gate, lying outside the town walls, allowed through travellers to avoid crowded Churchgate which bordered on the walls.

Although they lived for more than a century, in constant dread of plague present or plague to come, Leicester's townspeople were more fortunate than those in many other towns — Loughborough, Hinckley and Melton, all of whom suffered greater proportionate mortality in their worst outbreaks. Leicester's sanitary arrangements were probably no better than in other towns of comparable size but the stringent regulations enforced during time of plague reflected favourably on the Corporation's ability to deal successfully with the situation. Certainly Leicester could have fared much worse. That she did not, was to the benefit as well as to the credit of her inhabitants.

#### NOTES

1. The text of the 1544 Litany will be found in F. E. Brightman, *The English Rite*, I, (1915), 174-191.
2. For a study of Leicester wills of this period, see F. E. Skillington, "Enclosed in Clay", *Transactions*, XLII (1966-67), 35.
3. Comparative estimated figures of population and mortality in London for these three epidemic years are:
 

Year	Population	Total deaths	Plague deaths
1603	250,000	42,940	33,347
1625	320,000	63,001	41,313
1665	460,000	97,306	68,596

(C. Creighton, *A History of Epidemics in Great Britain*, I (1894, revised edition, 1965), 660).

4. *Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, III (1955), 167.
5. *Ex inform.* Dr. E. A. Wrigley, quoting Dr. R. S. Schofield's work on a population listing for Poole (Dorset) in 1574.
6. Oakham Urban District had a population of 4,089 in 1961. (*General Register Office 1961 Census Report for the County of Rutland* (1964), 2.
7. *V.C.H. Leics.* IV (1958), 156.



8. W. G. Hoskins has suggested an average of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  persons to a family for Wigston Magna in 1670. ("The Population of an English Village", *Transactions*, XXXIII (1957-58), 19). For an urban community, an average family size of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  persons would seem appropriate, at this date; a view supported, except for central parishes in large towns, by R. S. Schofield's comments on L. Bradley, "Estimates of Population Size: Hearth Tax". *Local Population Studies*, No. 1 (Autumn 1968), 33.

9. The following figures of annual Baptisms and Burials during the period 1661-70 support this estimate:

Parish	Baptisms	Burials
St. Martin's	52	56
St. Margaret's	36	39
St. Mary's	24	22
All Saints	21	34
St. Nicholas	13	10
	<hr/> 146	<hr/> 161

St. Leonard's church was ruined in the Civil War, in 1645, and this parish has, therefore, been ignored in these figures.

- (*V.C.H. Leics.* IV, 192).
10. Although the birth rate continued to rise until about 1610, there were several years of high mortality in the 1590s. (*V.C.H. Leics.* III, 141-2).
11. Loughborough Parish Registers (*Leics. County Record Office*).
12. For further details of plague in Loughborough, see N. Griffin, "Epidemics in Loughborough 1539 to 1640", *Transactions*, XLIII (1967-68), 24. This author in quoting Chester "as being the only other place besides Loughborough to record an outbreak of plague in 1558" appears to have ignored the Leicester evidence. Deaths from influenza were probably included on the plague death roll.
13. Throughout this paper, calculations of the number of wills are based on the Calendar entries in H. Hartopp, *Leicestershire Wills and Administrations, 1495-1649* (1902).
14. *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, Vol. III (1509-1603), edited by M. Bateson, revised by W. H. Stevenson and J. E. Stocks, (1905), 110. (Hereafter abbreviated as *R.B.L.* III).
15. W. Kelly, *Visitations of the Plague at Leicester*. (This paper was read before the Royal Historical Society 12 July 1877 and later published separately). An earlier version of it appeared in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Old Series (1877), 395-447.
16. *R.B.L.* III, 112; Kelly, *op.cit.*, 7-8. The Chamberlain's Accounts ran annually from Michaelmas (29 September) to 28 September.
17. T. North, *Chronicle of the Church of St. Martin's in Leicester* (1866), 166.
18. The Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight were the two companies of the Corporation, who also elected the mayor annually, and were officially constituted in the Charter of Incorporation in 1589. The Twenty-Four derived from the Twenty-Four Jurats of Norman times, whilst the Forty-Eight had been created in 1489 by Act of Parliament, which, *inter alia*, provided that the land of the burgesses was to be held by forty-eight of their number. A later Charter (1599) gave the title of Alderman to each of the *Four-and-Twenty*; previously only ten superior officers of the wards were so termed. (*R.B.L.* III, Introduction xvii, xviii, xxv).
19. *R.B.L.* III, 179.
20. *R.B.L.* III, 179.
21. *R.B.L.* III, xviii, 193. It seems the mention of "commoners and inhabitants", in this and subsequent references, refers to two separate classes of the townspeople, which appear not to have been accurately defined, or, indeed, may have been variously interpreted at different dates. It is suggested that the "commoners" contributed to the borough charges and that the "inhabitants" were the other households. After the Charter of 1599, the Twenty-Four and Forty-Eight were often referred to as the "Common Council" but the "commoners and inhabitants" were two classes below this status. The Freemen were those who had paid the fees of the Chapman's Gild, and it is incorrect to consider them as "commoners" in this context.
22. *R.B.L.* III, 193.

23. Kelly, *op.cit.* 55 quotes John Buck, Borough medical officer of Health, who, in a paper, "Epidemics in the Middle Ages" read before the Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society in 1849, thought the 1593-4 outbreak, due to its low mortality, was more a malignant fever than true oriental plague.
24. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 11.
25. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 11.
26. County Justice was the usual term for a Justice of the Peace at this date. Originally, a County Justice was required to hold a specified property qualification.
27. *R.B.L.* III, 292.
28. J. Thompson, *History of Leicester* (1849), 296.
29. *R.B.L.* III, 292.
30. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 16
31. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 16
32. *R.B.L.* III, 294.
33. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 16. This threat was evidently carried out; 20s. was paid "to one who labored to procure letters" from the Privy Council.
34. Thompson, *op.cit.*, 298.
35. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 13.
36. *R.B.L.* III, 293.
37. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 14-15.
38. *R.B.L.* III, 295.
39. *R.B.L.* III, 295.
40. *R.B.L.* III, 297; Kelly, *op.cit.*, 18.
41. Sir Francis Gawdy (knighted in 1603) became Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas. He played a prominent part in the trials of Essex and Raleigh and earlier had acted in a minor rôle at the trial of Mary, Queen of Scots.
42. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 18.
43. *R.B.L.* III, 303; Kelly, *op.cit.*, 19.
44. These figures suggest that the County was feeling the impact of this epidemic before it reached Leicester; the list of wills for 1592 shows there were many places involved.
45. *R.B.L.* Vols. I to III, *passim*.
46. Griffin, *op.cit.*, 32.
47. Referred to as the "Old Hospital". It was founded by Henry of Lancaster in 1330. The "New Hospital" was Wyggeston's Hospital.
48. *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, IV (1603-1688), edited by H. Stocks and W. H. Stevenson, (1923), 3.
49. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 21.
50. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 22. The coal was presumably for use in the streets: smoke was thought to purify the air.
51. Kelly, *op. cit.*, 22.
52. *R.B.L.* IV, 6.
53. A. Gooder, *Plague and Enclosure: A Warwickshire Village in the Seventeenth Century*. Coventry and North Warwickshire History Pamphlet Series (1965), 5.
54. This was the second time the house of Thomas Nix had been plague-stricken. Nix, a fishmonger, had been mayor of Leicester in 1597, but he suffered many misfortunes and resigned from the Corporation in 1600. In 1623, at the age of 80, he petitioned the Corporation for an annuity, referring to his losses through plague and many payments under suretyship. He was obliged to sell his house and pawn his goods. An annuity of £5 was granted and he lived until 1629. (*R.B.L.* IV 204; H. Hartopp, *Roll of the Mayors of the Borough and Lord Mayors of the City of Leicester 1209-1935* (1935), 79-80.
55. *R.B.L.* IV, 71.
56. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 23.
57. *R.B.L.* IV, 78.
58. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 24.
59. *R.B.L.* IV, 92.
60. *R.B.L.* IV, 108-9; Kelly *op.cit.*, 29, 30.



61. *R.B.L.* IV, 100. Dr. John Pottle (from Gloucester) was at Corpus Christi College, Oxford: Fellow 1568, B.A. 1570, M.A. 1573; B.Med. 1580. (J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714*, vol. 3 (repr. 1968), 1187). He seems to have achieved wide fame for both remedies and preventatives.
62. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 25.
63. *R.B.L.* IV, 101.
64. Since he was an innkeeper, the mayor may not have acted without a vested interest. (Hartopp, *op.cit.*, 84).
65. *R.B.L.* IV, 103.
66. *i.e.* North Bridge.
67. *i.e.* the present Market Place.
68. *R.B.L.* IV, 105.
69. *R.B.L.* IV, 105.
70. *R.B.L.* IV, 110.
71. *R.B.L.* IV, 110.
72. *i.e.* the narrow lanes and alleys between High Street and Sanvey Gate.
73. *R.B.L.* IV, 110-11. The figure of £163 15s. 6d. suggests the assessment was in force for more than a year, but no further details about this have been found.
74. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 32.
75. *R.B.L.* IV, 114.
76. *R.B.L.* IV, 103. John Chippendale, D.C.L. at All Souls, Oxford, 1573, was the bishop of Lincoln's commissary for the Leicester Archdeaconry for more than 40 years, and from 1575-1609 also held the prebend of Welton Ryval. A Freeman of the Borough of Leicester, he was a Burgess for Parliament in 1588 and was later a County Justice. He was engaged in many disputes with the Corporation over leases and property. (*cf.* *R.B.L.* III, 296- the Castle Mills Suit). On one occasion the Town Clerk, William Dethick, warned that "Chippendale shall be kindly dealt with, as his influence is considerable and might be used for or against the Corporation". (*R.B.L.* IV, 27).
77. *R.B.L.* IV, 119.
78. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 33.
79. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 33.
80. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 34.
81. Reference has been made to the few Bishop's Transcripts surviving for these two parishes for the years in question.
82. *R.B.L.* IV, 139.
83. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 35.
84. *R.B.L.* IV, 118-9.
85. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 37.
86. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 37.
87. *R.B.L.* IV, 141.
88. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 44.
89. *R.B.L.* IV, 235.
90. *R.B.L.* IV, 222.
91. *R.B.L.* IV, 226.
92. *R.B.L.* IV, 224.
93. *R.B.L.* IV, 232. The figure of 3,000 communicants probably represented an inflated estimate.
94. Creighton, *op.cit.*, 526.
95. *R.B.L.* IV, 235. ("Soar" is wrongly transcribed as "Swan").
96. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 49.
97. During excavations in 1951, skeletons believed to be plague burials were discovered 36 feet west of the Turret Gateway (*cf.* *Transactions*, XXVIII, (1952-3), 27). Kelly held the view that the part of St. Mary's Close referred to was Freeman's Common, and he surmised that a Pest-house was situated there.
98. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 46.
99. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 46.
100. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 46-7. Bear Hill Cross was the present-day Haymarket.
101. *R.B.L.* IV, 288; Kelly, *op.cit.*, 47.
102. *R.B.L.* IV, 288.
103. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 47.
104. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 48. Northampton had 665 deaths in 1638 — five times its normal number. Leicester feared the worst.

105. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 50. The watch on market days was increased from the normal one person to four, and disbursements to keep Loughborough people away from Leicester totalled £50.  
 106. *R.B.L.* IV, 323-4.  
 107. Kelly, *op. cit.*, 49-50.  
 108. *R.B.L.* IV, 376; Kelly *op.cit.*, 50.  
 109. There was one confirmed plague death in 1648. (Kelly, *op.cit.*, 51).  
 110. *R.B.L.* IV, 496.  
 111. At this date the normal burial rate at Skeffington did not exceed 4 a year, yet between 14 August and 17 October 1665 28 were buried.  
 112. *R.B.L.* IV, 503. On 7 July Alderman Baker was appointed to be in charge of plague prevention, and Christopher Norrice, John Tirlington, John Loseby and Robert Silbie were appointed watchmen.  
 113. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 53.  
 114. Kelly, *op.cit.*, 19-20.

## APPENDIX I — THE 1610-11 EPIDEMIC

Table 1

PARISH MORTALITY TABLES BY MONTH OVER A THREE-YEAR PERIOD

(St. Margaret's and St. Leonard's incomplete)

1609

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
St. Martin's	3	4	8	3	3	1	3	4	2	4	3	4	42
St. Margaret's	—	—	—	2	3	5	4	2	2	2	1	0	21
St. Mary's	0	2	3	4	3	4	4	3	4	2	0	0	29
All Saints	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	2	5	6	5	3	27
St. Leonard's	—	—	1	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4
St. Nicholas	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	2	2	9
	4	7	14	11	11	12	12	11	13	17	11	9	132

1610

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
St. Martin's	2	4	7	3	5	3	3	6	21	14	12	3	83
St. Margaret's	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
St. Mary's	2	1	4	1	5	12	11	26	15	11	24	12	124
All Saints	4	2	3	2	0	4	4	0	1	7	3	0	30
St. Leonard's	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
St. Nicholas	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	3	2	11
	9	11	16	6	10	20	19	32	37	33	42	17	252

1611

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
St. Martin's	1	12	3	15	17	24	25	15	4	2	1	6	125
St. Margaret's	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Mary's	2	4	9	20	10	5	3	4	1	1	1	4	64
All Saints	0	3	4	1	1	2	28	20	11	1	4	2	77
St. Leonard's (missing)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Nicholas	1	2	4	2	1	0	1	11	5	0	0	0	27
	4	21	20	38	29	31	57	50	21	4	6	12	293

Table 2

COMBINED TABLE OF BURIALS 1610-11

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
All Parishes	13	32	36	44	39	51	76	82	58	37	48	29	545

(St. Margaret's and St. Leonard's incomplete)



Table 3

APPROXIMATE ANNUAL BURIAL RATES DURING THE EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

	Column 1 1601-5	Column 2 1606-9, 12	Column 3 1616-20	Note. The years 1613-14 have been excluded due to low mortality;* 1615 has been excluded due to high 'non-plague' mortality. The figures in brackets for St. Margaret's and St. Leonard's have been averaged and are based on Bishop's Register Transcripts.
St. Martin's	37	37	34	
St. Margaret's	(22)	(24)	23	
St. Mary's	20	28	18	
All Saints	22	20	23	
St. Nicholas	5	10	9	
St. Leonard's	( 3)	( 4)	( 5)	
	<hr/> 109	<hr/> 123	<hr/> 112	

\*There had been a net loss of population in the plague years and the leeway was not yet made up.

Table 4

TWO-YEAR MORTALITY TABLE BY PARISH, SHOWING ACTUAL AND NORMAL BURIAL RATES

	1610	1611	Total	Normal two-year figure*	No. of Times increase of actual over normal mortality
St. Martin's	83	125	208	74	3
St. Margaret's		(Estimated 120)		48	2.5
St. Mary's	124	64	188	56	3.4
All Saints	30	77	107	40	2.6
St. Nicholas	11	27	38	20	1.9
St. Leonard's		(Estimated 20)		8	2.25
			<hr/> 681	<hr/> 246	<hr/> 2.77

\*based on Column 2 Table 3

[Since this article was written a very important book on the history and aetiology of plague has appeared which urges considerable revision of "plague" statistics. J. F. D. Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969) — *Ed.*]

## APPENDIX II—PARISH MORTALITY TABLE BY MONTH DURING 1626

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total	Average Burials 1621-5	No. Times Increase of Actual over Average Burials
St. Martin's	6	8	5	13	2	4	6	6	1	5	4	5	65	34	1.9
St. Margaret's	6	10	2	4	8	1	6	3	7	5	8	1	61	31	1.9
St. Mary's*	3	2	0	3	3	1	3	4	3	6	5	2	35	25	1.4
All Saints	3	4	2	2	7	4	7	2	8	4	3	1	47	21	2.2
St. Nicholas	0	1	2	0	0	5	6	0	1	0	0	0	15	8	1.9
St. Leonard's †	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	( 1 )	( 5 )	—
	19	25	11	22	20	15	28	15	20	20	20	9	224	124	1.8

\*Including Plague deaths as marked.

Note: This table shows mortality to be above normal in all months except March and December, thus casting doubt on the first suspected plague burial having occurred as late as the stated date of 26 May.

†Incomplete.



APPENDIX III — PLAGUE PASS or CERTIFICATE OF HEALTH  
relating to a woman journeying from Plague infested Leicester  
to her husband in Northamptonshire.

'Villa' Leic: These are to certifie all the Queenes Majesties officers and lovinge subjects, to whom theise presents shall come, that the bearer, Alice Stynton, the wief of John Stynton, of the towne of Leycester, pettye chapman, dothe dwell and inhabyte in the parish of St. Nicholas, in the said town, in a street called the Sore Laine\* neyre unto the West Bridge. (\*i.e. later 'Lower Redcross St.')

"The which John Stynton hathe not bene in Leycester sythence one fortnytt after St. James Daye last but travelinge abroad in Northamptonshier about his lawfull affaires in gatheringe under the Greate Seale of England, by lycence, for a poore house at Waltam Crosse.

"And this bearer, his wief, with hym all the said tyme, untill her nowe comyng hom to Leycester which was aboute a weeke past. The which bearer her dwellyng ys not neyre unto places suspected of the plage but ys cleyre and sound from the same, God be thancked, neyther ys there any att this present sicke thereof in the said streete or parish, God be praised. Do therefore request you to permytt and suffer her quietlye to travell to her husband, and also to permytt and suffer her said husband and her quietlye upon ther honest behavire to travell aboute ther lawfull busynes withoute any your hyndrance, and you the constables to helpe them to lodgings in ther said travell yf such nede shall require. In witnes whereof, we the mayor and alderman of the saide towne of Leycester have hereunto subscribed our names, and sette the Seale of Office of the said mayor, this vith daye of October 1593, A' 35° Eliz".

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