

## The "Black Death" in Somersetshire, 1348-9.

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IN this paper I have endeavoured to bring together the accumulating evidence from records of all kinds relating to the mortality in the county at this date. The Episcopal registers have already been utilized, but owing to the irregular manner in which the institutions were entered, the dates given in Weaver's *Somerset Incumbents* are sometimes out by a year or more. Also in estimating the relative proportion of the mortality among the clergy, account must be taken of the number of endowed chantries, where the Bishop had the power of institution, and also of the real number of parishes in Bath and Ilchester. It seemed worth while to try and make these figures as accurate as possible, because they provide the only means whereby this proportion in one class of the population can be definitely stated; and the figures of contemporary historians checked, and, if necessary, modified.

The last issued volume of the *Inquisitiones post mortem* covers this period and provides a certain amount of information about the mortality among the landowners, but as will be noticed further on, this information cannot be so precise as in the case of the clergy. The evidence from the Court rolls of two manors is also considered; and a few miscellaneous items are collected at the end.

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The terrible expression "Black Death" is of doubtful value. On the one hand it is universally received as referring, without any further explanations, to the great mortality

which afflicted Europe in the middle of the fourteenth century : 1348-1351. But then it gives rise to the erroneous impression that it was a new disease, which after ravaging the civilised world disappeared never to return, like a comet with a parabolic orbit.

It is now recognized that it was really the Bubonic plague, which first made its appearance in history in the days of the Emperor Justinian, and has never ceased to trouble Asia and the adjacent parts of Africa and Europe. It destroyed four millions inhabitants of India in the early part of this century.

What does distinguish the outbreak of 1348-51 from this and countless other outbreaks is that it is one of the two great instances of a plague-virus with vast diffusive power, enormous momentum, and centuries of endurance.<sup>1</sup>

A review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 6th September, 1917, points out that the strain which came on the world of the Roman Empire, and broke it, was threefold. There was firstly the external pressure of the Northern nations, an irresistible inflooding and penetration. Then came the depopulation of the civilized world by the years of the great plague in the reign of Justinian, which first appeared in Europe at Byzantium in 543, and is boldly estimated to have carried off one hundred million persons. Thirdly, there was the decay and slow disappearance of the strain of civilizing intelligence, which had created Greece and Rome ; and the re-emergence everywhere of a subterranean barbarism. It will be seen that the second cause had a great deal to do with the third, and to a lesser degree with the first as well.

This visitation and the Black Death are the two greatest calamities which have ever befallen the human race ; but curiously enough they eventually produced exactly the opposite effects.

The first ushered in the Dark Ages of ignorance, cruelty, and superstition ; while the second gave rise to the new world of freedom and progress, physical, mental, and spiritual. But in each case the cause was the same : the destruction of the forces which upheld the existing state of affairs.

1. C. Creighton : *History of Epidemics in Britain*, I, 173.

In the first case the civilised population of the Empire disappeared; and in the second the enslaved population of the European states was so diminished that the residue was able to make better terms with their masters; and the growth of liberty became incapable of suppression, but, as was said above, proved an irresistible inflooding and penetration.

The Pestilence appeared in Western Europe at the commencement of 1348. Some Italian merchants who were besieged by the Tartars at Caffa in the Crimea escaped and returned to Genoa by sea. Although the ship's company remained well during the voyage; within two days of their arrival the plague broke out in its most deadly form. Marseilles was infected almost simultaneously, and the infection passed up the Rhone valley to reach Avignon by the end of January. As this city was then the abode of the Popes, the news rapidly spread, though hardly faster than the sickness. It had reached Bordeaux before August; and about the festival of St. James (25th July) appeared in Normandy. The Archbishop of York, William Zouche, towards the end of July ordered prayers with litanies and processions "because of the mortal pestilence and infection of the atmosphere now hanging over various parts of the world and especially England."

On the 17th August, 1348, Ralph de Salopia, Bishop of Bath and Wells, made a similar order for his diocese "that God may protect the people from the pestilence which had come from the East into the neighbouring kingdom," *i.e.* France. The Bishop evidently was quite unaware that the pestilence had come into the neighbouring county of Dorset; and therefore the date assigned by a contemporary writer for the commencement of the outbreak at Weymouth, the 7th July, is too early. The latter part of August is the more probable period for the beginning of the mortality. That Dorsetshire was the first county to be attacked can be proved by the only definite records we possess, which are the Episcopal registers containing the lists of institutions and vacant benefices.

The registers at this period do not record the date when the benefice became vacant. But there are many reasons why the vacancy was not of the lengthy duration to which

parishes have now to submit. Canon Jessopp has produced one in the risk that if the patron did not exercise his right at once he might find it rendered void by a papal provision. But, when as it frequently happened during the mortality, a benefice was filled a second or third time we have a known period between each institution. In the diocese of Bath and Wells it appears that in two instances there is a space of about one week between the institutions, in two instances it is two weeks, in six instances three or four weeks, in four other instances five or six weeks. Where the space covers more time it probably means that the new incumbent lived a longer or shorter time before he too was cut off in the midst of his flock.

We may allow that on an average one month would probably elapse before the vacancy was filled up, or rather reversing the statement in this connection, that the vacancy had occurred one month before the institution was entered in the Episcopal register.

The statements in the paper are based on this assumption ; and all the dates are reduced to new style.

The institutions to Dorsetshire parishes show a great increase in October. From an average of one in every three weeks during the earlier part of the year the figures suddenly rise to five in October, and fifteen in November. The plague had begun. As the rise in the county of Somerset begins one month later it is clear that the infection made its way through Dorsetshire during September, and appeared on the extreme southern border at Pendermer on the 30th September (institution dated 30th October).

But Somersetshire, like Dorset, has a coastline, and was infected on this side simultaneously with the southern area. In fact Weymouth and Bristol (with Bridgwater) seem to be the two points at which the Black Death entered England.

Some primitive kind of quarantine or other preventive measures were probably taken when it was too late ; as the diocese of Exeter (Devon and Cornwall) was infected one month later than Somersetshire ; and in Hants the mortality only became serious in January and February. If the ports were open, it would be expected that the further western counties (or Southampton) would first of all have been infected ;

whereas Dorset and Somerset come first, and spread the infection round about. The delay in the progress of the plague would partly arise from the fact that it began in the autumn of a very wet year, when fewer people would be moving with greater difficulty along the roads of the period.

For the first ten months of 1348 the institutions in Somerset number twenty-four, which gives an average of under three. They are spread evenly through the county, not exceeding two in each deanery except in the cases of Axbridge and Frome. The first had three, but two are dated in January. Frome had four, the latest being Nunney on the 12th October. A probable vacancy on the 12th September seems to preclude the idea of the plague; but there must have been some cause for the mortality, as no deanery suffered more from the pestilence when it did arrive.

In October the number of vacancies suddenly rose to nine. Charlton Adam (near Somerton), 11th; Yeovil vicarage, 17th; Elm (near Frome), 19th; and Evercreech, 20th. On the other side of the county—Saltford, 8th; Uphill and Easton in Gordano, 12th; Bridgwater, 21st; and Clevedon on the 27th. With the exception of Bridgwater these are all near Bristol; in addition we may note that on the 20th October there was an election of a Prioress at Barrow Gurney, but the reason of the vacancy is not stated.<sup>1</sup>

During November the vacancies amounted to thirty-one. With the exception of a chantry at Crewkerne and the vicarage of South Petherton, the Deaneries of Crewkerne and Taunton were not touched; the infection moving northward on a broad front as if impelled by the usually prevalent southerly winds. The sub-deaneries of Milborne Port and Bruton also suffered little.

But there were vacancies at Mudford on 8th; the chantry at East Coker on 16th; Odcombe on 9th; and Limington and the chantry of Limington on 14th; at Castle Cary on 1st, and Ansford on 4th; a chantry in Wells Cathedral on 16th, Wookey 9th, Weare 17th, and Cheddar 21st.

In the Frome Deanery, there were vacancies at Woolverton

1. Hugo: *Proc.*, XII, ii, 67.

and Kilmersdon on 7th ; Whatley 10th, Cloford 12th, Foxcote 14th, and Elm on 15th.

Bath Deanery was not yet affected. South-west of Bristol on the coast there were vacancies at St. Katherine's Hospital, Bedminster, on 5th November, Portishead 10th, Weston-s.-Mare 11th, Long Ashton 12th, Kewstoke 17th, Worle and Tickenham on 24th.

Lyng was vacant on 2nd November, and a chantry at Woolavington on the 18th ; but otherwise the neighbourhood of Bridgwater remains uninfected.

There was mortality even in the recesses of the Brendon Hills and Exmoor. Stoke Pero was vacant on the 4th November, Cutcombe on 22nd, and Brompton Regis on the 27th. Taunton Deanery remains free.

In December the vacancies rise from thirty-one to forty-six. The only large deanery free is Crewkerne, while the plague has reached Bath. Ilchester, Merston, Castle Cary, and Frome have twenty-three vacancies between them ; Bath has seven : Keynsham on 4th ; the abbot was dead about this date. Bathford on 9th ; Batheaston, Bathampton, and Weston on 10th ; on the 18th Batheaston was again vacant, and on the 22nd Twerton.

On the Bristol Channel Worle was vacant for the second time on the 13th, and Rowberrow on 16th. Easton in Gordano for the second time on 18th, Stanton Drew on 8th, and Ubley on 28th ; so the infection is making its way inland. Round Bridgwater, Wembdon and Thurloxtton were vacant on 3rd, Goathurst on 9th ; and Wembdon chantry on 13th. There were vacancies in the Dunster R.D. at Minehead, Nettlecombe and Old Cleeve. With these figures for November and December it is plain why the Bishop on the 10th January, 1349, issued a mandate relaxing the rules relating to confession. Sick people in the absence of a priest might confess to a layman or even a woman, and clergy in deacon's orders might administer the Reserved Sacrament.

During January the mortality hardly slackened, there being thirty-eight vacancies as against forty-six. There was a falling off in the eastern area, the four Deaneries of Ilchester, Merston, Castle Cary and Frome having only sixteen instead

of twenty-three, while in the Bath area there is only one against seven. On the other hand the pestilence is raging in Crewkerne Deanery, eight vacancies against none for the previous month, in Dunster six against three, and in Taunton five against two. However in the Bridgwater Deanery the vacancies dropped four to one. The Crewkerne figure is the highest for any single month during the outbreak. The vacancies were at Chaffcombe, Cricket St. Thomas, Hinton St. George, East Lambrook, Puckington, Isle Brewers, and Capland (twice).

During February and March, there is no falling off, the figure remaining at thirty-eight. There is an actual rise in the number of vacancies in the Deaneries, Axbridge, Castle Cary, Chew, and Bridgwater; no relief in Frome, Ilchester, Bridgwater, and Crewkerne. Glastonbury has a vacancy in each month.

In April at length there is a decided improvement. Only seventeen vacancies are recorded, the Deaneries of Axbridge, Frome, and Crewkerne being the only districts showing any serious mortality. From this month conditions rapidly improved; by August the county is practically clear. It may be put forward as a proof that all vacancies had been filled as fast as they were made, that after August, 1349, the monthly average of institutions is almost the same as in the period immediately preceding the arrival of the pestilence.

In giving the figures for each Rural Deanery and sub-district, we must remember that the total number of benefices and endowed chantries to which the Bishop possessed the right of institution and induction was considerably less than at the present time. When we have also added the benefices which have been amalgamated with others, or simply disappeared, it appears that there were altogether 413 instead of 510 according to the Diocesan Calendar.

Axbridge Deanery then contained ten benefices. There were two vacancies in November, at Wookey and Cheddar; Wookey was again vacant in February. In April, Loxton, Christon, and Compton Bishop.

Five benefices (one twice) exactly one half. There is no appointment recorded to Wedmore between 1311 and 1361, nor to Westbury between 1317 and 1403.

Burnham sub-district contained ten benefices. Weare was vacant in November; Bleadon and Berrow in February, and Burnham in March: a total of four out of ten benefices.

Locking sub-district contained twelve benefices. Weston-s.-Mare, Kewstoke and Worle were vacant in November; Rowberrow and Worle for the second time in December; Winscombe and Worle for the third time in January; Congresbury and Weston for the second time in March; and Rowberrow for the second time in April. Seven of the twelve benefices were filled, two twice, and one three times in five weeks.

Exactly half the benefices in the united Deanery were emptied between November and May.

The Castle Cary Deanery contained twenty-one benefices. Castle Cary and Ansford were vacant in November; Holton, North Barrow, and Compton Pauncefoot in December; Wheathill and Ansford (2) in January; Keinton Mandeville, Ansford (3) and North Barrow (2) in February; Hornblotton, Sparkford, Barton, Weston Bampfild, and Ansford (4) in March; Sparkford for the second time in June, and North Barrow for the third time in July. Twelve benefices became vacant, and nineteen clergy apparently died in seven months.

The Bruton sub-district contained thirteen parishes. Only four became vacant, but Evercreech and Spargrove were filled twice over.

In the Shepton Mallet sub-district there are now seventeen parishes; in 1348 there were only eight. Pilton and East Pennard were vacated once; Doulling and Croscombe twice. Two chantry priests died at Wells, but as I do not know the total number established at this period they are omitted in the totals for the Rural Deanery.

The whole Deanery contained forty-three benefices. Twenty were vacated between October and March, and thirty-one clergy were instituted.

Frome Rural Deanery contained twenty-two benefices; but there are no presentations to Berkeley, Farleigh Hungerford, and Laverton, before 1362. As stated above there were four vacancies in the earlier part of 1348. In October there was one at Elm; in November, at Woolverton, Whatley, and



Cloford ; in December, at Hardington, on the 3rd and again on 17th, Cloford (2), Babington ; in January, at Egforton and Buckland Dinham ; in February, at Hardington (3) and Pikewell near Frome ; in March, at Tellisford and Cloford (3) ; in April, at Beckington and Standerwick ; in May, at Elm ; in September, at Marston Bigot and Frome Braunche. Sixteen benefices were vacated, and nineteen clergy instituted.

The Midsomer Norton sub-division then contained nineteen benefices. In November, Kilmersdon and Foxcote were vacant ; in December, Holcombe and Chewton ; in January, East Harptree and Dunkerton ; in February, Litton ; in March, Wellow on the 3rd and again on 29th, and Stratton on the Fosse. Nine benefices were vacated, and ten clergy appointed.

For the whole Deanery with forty-one parishes, twenty-five were vacated, and twenty-nine clergy appointed. It is evidence of the depopulation of this district that the parishes or benefices of Egforton, Fairoke, Frome Braunche, Pikewell, and Standerwick, are absorbed into other parishes or simply disappear before many years are passed.

Glastonbury Rural Deanery now contains seventeen benefices ; but at this period there were only seven where the institutions appear in the Episcopal registers. Of these—Butleigh, Meare, Shapwick, Street, Weston Zoyland, escaped. Ashcott had a vacancy in July, 1348 ; again in December, and in April, 1349 ; Moorlinch had vacancies in March and May.

The Ilchester Rural Deanery now contains eighteen benefices. It is difficult to say exactly how many were in existence in 1348, as the number of parishes in Ilchester is doubtful. In the thirteenth century there were seven including a chantry in the church of St. Mary major ; but the churches of St. Olave and St. Peter are only mentioned once. The Taxation of Pope Nicholas throws no light on the matter. There were also endowed chantries at Aller, Charlton Adam, Limington, Lytes Cary, and Wyke Perham. The number of benefices mentioned in the Bishop's register may be reckoned at twenty-three.

The chantry of Charlton Adam was vacant in October ;

Limington parish and chantry in November; in December, Ilchester St. Mary major, Northover, Lytes Cary chantry, and Kingsdon; in January, Yeovilton and Charlton Adam; in February, Charlton Adam chantry (2); and again in March, which also had a vacancy at Pitney Lorty; in May, at Huish Episcopi; and at High Ham in August. Twelve benefices were vacated, one three times.

The Martock sub-district contained seventeen parishes and the Free Chapel of St. Nicholas at Stoke under Hamdon. At Pendomer in September occurred the first vacancy due to the pestilence. There was then a pause until the middle of November when Odcombe was vacant; in December, Montacute and Middle Chinnock; in January, Stoke under Hamdon chapel and Thorn Coffin; in March, Norton sub Hamdon, Sock Dennis, Montacute (2), and Odcombe (2); in May, Chiselborough; and in June, Haselbury Plucknett. Ten benefices were vacated, and twelve clergy appointed.

For the whole Deanery with forty-one benefices, twenty-two were vacated, and twenty-six clergy appointed.

The Merston Deanery contained fifteen benefices and a chantry at East Coker. At Yeovil there was a rector as well as a vicar, but he seems to have been generally non-resident. There was an institution to Yeovil vicarage on 17th November, and vacancies at Mudford and the East Coker chantry. In December there were two vacancies in Yeovil vicarage (institutions on 1st and 29th January), and at Sutton Bingham. In January, at Mudford (2), Queen Camel and Rimpton; in February, at Marston Magna; in March, at Chilton Cantelo and East Coker; in June, at Chilton (2), Closworth, and Rimpton (2). Ten out of sixteen benefices were vacated, and fifteen clergy appointed.

The sub-district of Milborne Port contained eleven parishes and a free chapel at South Cheriton. It escaped lightly compared to Merston. There were two vacancies at Horsington in December; at Charlton Horethorne in January; at Stowell in April; and in June at Sandford Orcas.

The whole Deanery contained twenty-eight benefices. Fourteen were vacated, and twenty clergy appointed.

Pawlett Deanery contained seven parishes, a chantry at

Ford, and two at Woolavington. One of these lost two chaplains, in November and January. There was a vacancy at Woolavington vicarage in March, and at Puriton in April. But like the Glastonbury Deanery, of which it is the topographical appendix, the peculiar physical conditions of the district helped to keep it isolated.

In examining the figures for the Bath Rural Deanery we are met by the same difficulty that was found at Ilchester, in ascertaining the number of parishes in the city of Bath. With a good deal of hesitation the number of benefices in 1348 may be counted as fourteen. Only three of these seem to have been vacated: Bathampton in December, February, and July; South Stoke in February and July; and Bathwick in March.

The Keynsham sub-district contained sixteen benefices. Saltford was vacant in October; in December, Keynsham, Bathford, Weston, Twerton, and Batheaston, institutions on 10th and 18th January; in January Burnett was vacant; in March, Kelston, and again in August; and in May, Stanton Prior. Nine benefices were vacated and eleven clergy appointed.

The whole Deanery is estimated to contain thirty benefices. Twelve were vacated, and seventeen clergy appointed.

The Deanery of Chew Magna contained fifteen benefices and the vicarage or perpetual chantry of Norton Hautville. Stowey, Butcombe, and Chewstoke do not appear in the Bishop's register until 1361 or later, the last named not till 1462. Stanton Drew and Ubley were vacant in November; Hinton Bluett in December; Winford, West Harptree, and High Littleton in February; Chelwood in March; and Norton Malreward in April.<sup>1</sup> Eight benefices were vacated, and as many clergy appointed.

The sub-district of Portishead then included Bedminster with the Hospital of St. Katherine, and the Chantry of St. Thomas the Martyr. There were also the free chapels of Claverham and Hydehall in Clevedon. On the other hand

1. This entry is given in Weaver's *Incumbents* as on fol. 341 of Ralph de Salopia's register, which contains entries for April, 1349. It is omitted in the printed copy, *Som. Rec. Soc.*, x, 591-3.

no institution to Brockley is recorded before 1422. There were altogether, reckoning in Brockley, twenty-two benefices. Owing to its proximity to Bristol the pestilence soon appeared. In October, Easton in Gordano and Clevedon were vacant; in November, St. Katherine's Hospital, Portishead, Long Ashton and Tickenham; in December, Easton in Gordano for the second time; in January, Holy Cross in Bristol; in February, Chelvey and Weston in Gordano; institutions were made to St. Katherine's Hospital on the 14th and 29th April, and on 7th July to St. Thomas's Chapel. Ten benefices were vacated, and thirteen clergy appointed.

The whole Deanery contained thirty-eight benefices. Eighteen were vacated, and twenty-one clergy appointed.

The Bridgwater Rural Deanery then contained seventeen benefices, including Chilton Trinity, Durston, Sheerston, and a chantry in Wembdon church. There was an institution to Bridgwater vicarage on 21st November, and ten days after to Lyng. During December there were vacancies at Wembdon both vicarage and chantry, Thurloxtton and Goathurst; towards the end of January at North Petherton. A second institution was made to Bridgwater on 4th March, and to Charlinch and Sheerston (a free chapel in North Petherton) at the end of the month. After this date the Deanery was free; though a second appointment was made to Sheerston in August. Ten benefices were vacated and twelve clergy were appointed.

The Quantockshead sub-district had thirteen benefices including the chantry at Kilve. Stockland Bristol was vacant in November; Crowcombe in February; and Otterhampton and Kilton in March. Late in the autumn there was an appointment to Holford.

In the whole Deanery there were thirty benefices. Fifteen were vacated, and seventeen clergy appointed.

Although the Deanery of Crewkerne was quite as open to infection as its eastern neighbour, the plague did not attack in full violence until January.

In Crewkerne R.D. there were twenty-four benefices including the three "portions" and two chantries in Crewkerne church. One of the chantries and South Petherton were

vacant in November. There was a lull in December; but in January there were vacancies at Chaffcombe, Hinton St. George, Cricket St. Thomas, and East Lambrooke; in February, at Dowlish Wake, Kingsbury, and Crewkerne chantry (2); in March, at Kingstone and Cricket Malherbie; in April, at Chard and a chantry at South Petherton. In June, Seavington St. Michael was vacant. This is a total of thirteen benefices vacated, and fourteen clergy appointed.

The Ilminster sub-district also contained twenty-four benefices. In January there were vacancies at Isle Brewers, Puckington, and at Capland, on the 6th and again on the 26th; in February, at Curry Rivel and Isle Abbots; in March, at Stocklinch Ottersey rectory and chantry; and in April, at South Bradon. Eight benefices were vacated, and nine clergy appointed.

In the whole Deanery with forty-eight benefices, twenty-one were vacated, and twenty-three clergy appointed. Like Frome this district is remarkable for the number of suppressed or amalgamated parishes formerly existing. They are South Bradon, Goose Bradon, Capland, Dowlish West, Earnshill, and Eastham.

Dunster Deanery contained twenty-two benefices. There were vacancies in November at Cutcombe and the remote parish of Stoke Pero; in December, at Minehead, Nettlecombe and Old Cleeve; in January, at Stoke Pero (2), Culbone, Cutcombe (2), and Treborough; in February, at Minehead (2), Old Cleeve, and Stogumber; in March, at Porlock; and a single institution in nearly every month till the end of the year.

Thirteen benefices were vacated, and seventeen clergy appointed. This portion of the original Deanery stretches along the sea coast; and that this was the danger zone is made very evident when we compare the figures for the sub-district of Wiveliscombe.

It contained fifteen parishes and during the six months during which the plague devastated the rest of the county there were only three institutions: on the 27th December to Brompton Regis; to Dulverton on the 11th February and to Winsford on the 23rd of the same month. Exford was

vacant in July, and Tolland in August. This comparative immunity is the more surprising as the Deaneries of Taunton and Wellington suffered in a full degree. The Bishop was well advised when he fixed his residence at the episcopal manor of Wiveliscombe, though it might have been expected that the constant stream of clerics coming for institution would have brought infection in their train.

On considering the clerical mortality in the Taunton Deanery we are met with the difficulty that in so many of the benefices the cures were served by the canons of Taunton Priory, and in consequence there are no lists of incumbents. Instead of the twenty-four benefices now existing, there were at this date only eleven. Orchard Portman was vacant in December; and in January the patron was the guardian of the infant heir, in place of Thomas de Orchard who presented in June, 1348. In February institutions were made to St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton, and to North Curry; in April to Pitminster; in May to Angersleigh; in June to North Curry and in July to Orchard Portman, both for the second time. Five benefices were vacated, and seven clergy appointed.

The sub-district of Wellington contained seventeen parishes and an endowed chantry at Combe Florey. There was a vacancy in December at Minehead; in January at Heathfield, Badialton, and the Combe Florey chantry; in February, at Combe Florey vicarage; in March, at Runnington; in April, at Wellington; and in June at Stawley and Oake.

From the records of these western Deaneries it is clear that the most remote and isolated position was no security to the inhabitants.

Nine benefices were vacated, and as many clergy appointed. In the whole Deanery with twenty-eight benefices there were fourteen vacated, and sixteen clergy appointed.

We can now trace the course of the pestilence pretty clearly. It lasted practically for six months, and only ceased because the surviving population was immune. It entered the county at two different points, the extreme south-west, and the mouth of the Avon. The southern range of infection spread rapidly northward. About eight weeks later the southern area was suddenly extended by the inclusion of the Rural

Deaneries of Crewkerne, Taunton, and Dunster. As far as available figures show, the Deaneries of Glastonbury and Pawlett escaped lightly. The long ridge of Polden is guarded on either side by submerged moors in the winter; and may possibly have been blocked at either end.

### INSTITUTIONS.

R.D.	Jan. to Oct.	1348			1349								Total
	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept. to Dec.		
Axbridge ..	3	—	6	2	2	3	3	4	—	—	—	—	23
Castle Cary	1	1	2	6	4	7	5	—	1	1	3	—	31
Frome ..	5	1	5	6	4	3	5	2	1	—	—	2	34
Glastonbury	1	—	1	—	—	1	1	1	—	—	—	—	5
Ilchester ..	2	1	3	6	4	3	6	1	1	1	—	1	29
Merston ..	2	2	2	4	4	1	2	1	—	4	—	1	23
Pawlett ..	—	—	1	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	4
Bath .. ..	2	1	—	7	1	2	2	—	—	—	2	1	18
Chew .. ..	1	2	4	3	2	5	4	—	—	1	1	3	26
Bridgwater ..	1	1	2	4	1	3	2	2	—	—	1	1	18
Crewkerne ..	2	—	2	—	8	5	4	3	—	2	1	3	30
Dunster ..	2	—	3	3	6	3	1	1	1	2	2	2	26
Taunton ..	2	—	—	5	1	2	2	1	3	—	—	—	16
	24	9	31	46	38	38	38	17	7	11	10	14	283

In the space of ten months 201 benefices out of a total number of 413 in the Diocese had been vacated, and 249 clergy appointed, sometimes for the second, third, and even fourth time. The proportion is nearly one half, 48.6 per cent.

## CLERGY NON-PAROCHIAL AND REGULAR.

The higher ranks of the clergy seem to have escaped. The Bishop, Dean, sub-Dean, and the three Archdeacons survived. There are only three appointments to Prebends during this period. In January, 1349, William Cammel received Wedmore Quinta, which had been held by Walter le Wyte; on 1st May, Henry de Ingleby received East Harptree; and on 23rd April, Thomas Beaufort received Curry.

Among the different monastic bodies the extant evidence shows little change. Unfortunately we lack any record of the mortality among the inmates as is elsewhere given by Gasquet and Jessopp. The Episcopal registers and the Public Records only refer to the Heads of the houses.

The first change was at Barrow Gurney. On the 20th October, 1348, Agnes Balun was elected to be Prioress, but the cause of the vacancy is not stated.

There can be no doubt of the reason of vacancies in the Mastership of St. Katherine's Hospital, Bedminster; to which appointments were made on 10th December, 1348, and on the 14th and the 29th April, 1349. A new Prior was appointed to the Hospital of St. John at Wells on 20th February; and on the 23rd of the same month the royal confirmation was given to the election of an Abbot of Keynsham. Muchelney on the 22nd May obtained licence to elect an Abbot in the place of John de Coudworth, deceased. On the 23rd September Athelney obtained licence to elect an abbot in place of Richard de Gotehurst; but on 10th October they obtained a fresh licence because John de Stoure, Abbot-elect, had died while on his way to the King to obtain the royal assent.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, on 22nd February, 1350, a new Head was appointed to the Priory of Burtle Moor in place of Robert de Baltiesborgh, deceased.

Canon T. Scott Holmes enumerates forty Religious Houses in his article in the *V. C. H.*, II, 68. After allowing for the fact that the lists of Heads are often very incomplete, it is evident that their mortality compared with the parochial clergy is comparatively minute.

1. *Pat. Rolls*, 1349, under dates.



#### CIVIL POPULATION.

The question of the exact rate of mortality among the civil population cannot be accurately reduced to figures. On the one side we have the statements of contemporary writers, who all agreed that the mortality was appalling. And as will be shown later on there are some records which certainly support these statements. On the other hand it is often mentioned by the same writers that the upper classes of society suffered much less. Their "expectation of life" has until comparatively lately always been higher than the rest of the population.

With regard to one particular section, those who held their land direct of the King and were known as tenants *in capite*, there are means of estimating this rise in mortality. On the demise of every tenant *in capite* an enquiry known as the "Inquisitio post mortem" was held to ascertain the extent and value of his lands, and the age of his heir, who if a minor would be the ward of the King. In 1349 the number of these enquiries was 311 as compared with a previous yearly average of 120. Cardinal Gasquet in the *Black Death*, 2nd edit., 1908, p. 115, has pointed out that this figure is not a true index of the mortality, because in that year there were 619 writs for enquiry sent to the Escheators. So quite one half were never acted on, or else the returns have perished.

In 1347 there was only one enquiry in the county. In 1348 there were six; in 1349, nine; in 1350, one; and in 1351 one again. In the two plague years there were fifteen enquiries instead of two.

But only a small portion of the land was held by this tenure. A very considerable part was held of the Church and Monastic bodies; and in this connection the Abbots, etc., may be regarded as landowners *in capite*. The remainder was held *mediate* of some great lord who was himself a tenant *in capite*. His own inquisition would enumerate the names of the mesne tenants; but their demise passed unnoticed in the public records. The greater part of the lands in West Somerset were held either of the Honour of Dunster, or throughout Taunton Deane of the Bishop of Winchester. In North Somerset the

Honour of Gloucester comprised countless manors. Of all the landowners in this category it is impossible to say who lived and who died. By examining the patronage list I have been able to pick out a few parishes where the presumption is that the patron as well as the clergyman perished.

Firstly as regards the tenants *in capite*. The last issued volume (no. ix) for the reign of Edward III covers the period of the pestilence, but the editor in the preface states that it does not contain the full record of deaths, as many passed without an enquiry, in some cases for over ten years. Until further volumes have appeared we cannot be sure that all the deaths are accounted for.

The family of Botreaux of North Cadbury stand out in terrible pre-eminence.

Margaret widow of Nicholas de Moels died on 11th March (or 18th), 1349. The Inquisition records that both at North and South Cadbury the pestilence had carried off tenants and thereby diminished the value of the manors. On 19th July (or 20th, or 28th) died her niece Isabel daughter of her brother-in-law John Moels, and wife of William Botreaux. In the same month William died on Wednesday, 22nd July; and apparently at the same time his step-mother Elizabeth the second wife of Sir Reginald Botreaux. (One inquest says 20th July, and another 9th October, but this is manifestly incorrect). Four members of one family perished; and three in one week.

The first demise is that of Henry de Haddon, a landowner in Somerset and Dorset, in which latter county he lived, most probably at Caundle Haddon, now Caundle Stourton. The inquest records that he died on the 16th August, 1648, just about the time when the plague appeared at Weymouth.

John de Broke resident at that place near Ilchester died on 3rd November (ix, 101); and Philip de Wellesleigh died on 8th November (ix, 115). John Dommer presented to Pendomer on 30th October, 1348, but the next presentation in 1351 was made by William Fitzwaryn, guardian of the heir of John Dommer. Thomas de Orchard presented to Orchard Portman on 4th June, 1348; the presentation on the 1st

January, 1349, was made by the Bishop of Winchester, guardian of the heir of Thomas de Orchard.

Philip de Faucombridge of Milton F. in Martock died 6th January, 1349. The inquisition records that Thomas Loterel, aged 25, is his cousin and heir (ix, 197). In the early spring Maud widow of William Faucombridge was dead. The writ for enquiry was issued 2nd April; but the jury did not meet at Yeovil until 11th June, when they found that she held no lands on the day she died (not stated: ix, 196). John Maltravers owned Henford Maltravers in Yeovil when he died on 22nd January, leaving for heir his son Henry aged one year. He also held *inter alia* East Morden in Dorsetshire. That manor is much diminished in value because all the tenants are dead (ix, 190).

John Inge of Corton Denham died 4th February. In 1340 he had made a settlement of Corton (*Som. Rec. Soc.*, xii, 205) on himself for life with divers remainders. The jury on the inquisition taken at Corton on 30th March returned that the first three persons named in the settlement were all dead. The jury also found that the heir of John Inge was his son Andrew, aged more than two years. For the Wilts property another inquisition was taken at Salisbury on 30th June, by which date Andrew was dead, and a younger son Stephen, aged 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  years, is the heir (ix, 212).

The patron of Horsington on the two vacancies in February was Ralph Russel, but another vacancy in December Eleanor (Aliana) Russel presented.

The patron of Bratton St. Maur in 1345 was Thomas de Lisle (Insula); in March, 1349, Richard Lovel was patron as guardian of Henry brother and heir of Thomas deceased.

Will Coffyn presented to Thorn Coffyn on 17th February; in 1352 Edmund de Clevedon was patron as guardian of the heir of Will Coffyn deceased.

Ralph Fitzurse presented to Treborough 22nd February; in 1351 the patron was his widow Millicent.

John de Cantelo of Chilton Cantelo died 23rd March; his heirs were his two infant daughters, Emma *æt.* five; Margaret *æt.* three (ix, 185).

Katherine Dowager Countess of Salisbury died 23rd April.

The Montacute family had large possessions in the county and often stayed at Donyat near Ilminster; but I do not know if the Countess died here; she was buried in Bustlesham Abbey (*D.N.B.*, xxxviii, 213). Andrew Braunch of Frome Braunche died 5th April. The jury of the inquisition made return that many dwellings in that manor, formerly let, were standing empty because most of the tenants were dead (ix, 353).

Thomas Durant of Newton Pley in North Petherton died 10th May. The patronage of South Bradon belonged in 1347 to John lord of South Bradon; in May, 1349, to Alice Kayel, and in 1351 to Maurice de la Valeye.

July was terribly fatal. Beside the deaths of four members of the Moels-Botreaux family given above, we find that Simon de Crowcombe, who probably lived at Leigh in that parish (licence for his oratory there, Ralph de Salopia, x, 495), died on 2nd July. The jury found that he held a moiety of the manor inclusive of 5 *sh.* of rent only, because the tenants are dead through the pestilence (ix, 130). Agnes late wife of Adam de Dene of King's Brompton died 16th July.

On the same day died Isabel late the wife of John Lovel of Titchmarch, the owner of Sparkford, etc. (ix, 464).

Margaret, late the wife of John la Warre, of Brislington died on 22nd August (ix, 237). During September Joan de Merlaund of Frome died on the 21st; and on the 28th William de la Tour who held Tyrelesheye and Yveton, both near Taunton (ix, 9).

Here for the present available evidence for the mortality among the landowning class ceases.

The evidence concerning the labouring population is principally inferential. The appalling mortality among the parochial clergy in every portion of the diocese without doubt found a parallel in their flocks. But apart from the few references in the inquisitions quoted above, so far as I am aware, in only two manors have court rolls for the terrible winter of 1348-9 been examined. An analysis of the rolls of Chedzoy preserved in the British Museum will be found in Gasquet, p. 195 (2nd edit.). It shows that the pestilence began some time between 29th September and 25th November, 1348; by the Festival of the Epiphany, 1349, it increased,

and between this date and 25th March was at the worst. At the court then held about fifty fines were paid by newly admitted tenants. The Court roll also records that a boy had been left without any near relatives; and that three plaintiffs in a law suit had all died.

The manor rolls of Curry Rivel for this period have been carefully analysed by the Rev. J. F. Chanter in a paper in our *Proceedings*, LVI, ii, 84. The Pestilence reached Curry between the middle of October and the middle of December. The roll for the court of 13th December records the death of eighteen tenants. The next roll for 24th February, 1349, records thirty-five deaths, of which fourteen had occurred in Broadway. At the next court held on Monday after the Feast of Annunciation, ten deaths were recorded and seventeen tenements were in the lord's hand for want of tenants. Mr. Chanter calculates that about two-fifths of the population of Curry had died in six months.

The Carthusian houses at Witham and Hinton petitioned the King in 1354-5 for leave to obtain labourers from outside the manor, on the ground that almost all their servants and retainers died in the last pestilence, and their lands remain waste and uncultivated (Gasquet, pp. 198-9).

I shall be very glad to hear of the results of examinations of the court rolls of other manors in this county for the period under review.

Another little piece of inferential evidence as to heavy mortality in this period has come to light in the examination of the muniment chest of Woborne's Almshouse, Yeovil. Among the miscellaneous deeds is one dated 7th January, 1353, whereby two surviving trustees convey the Zuldhouse (Guildhouse) in Stoford to a new body of eighteen trustees.<sup>1</sup>

On comparing the list with that of the taxpayers in 1327 we find that two names appear in both lists; that one surname reappears in another generation, and that the remaining fifteen surnames are all new. Between these two dates the

1. When Mr. J. Batten issued his *Historical Notes on South Somerset* in 1894 this deed with several others was supposed to be lost; but this year I had the satisfaction of finding the lost parcel packed up in a bundle of modern leases of the Almshouse property.

leading inhabitants of what was then an important borough had been completely changed; and a new set of feoffees had been required only four years after the visitation of the Plague.

The fact that stands out on the clearest evidence is that in six months dating from the end of October, 1348, to the end of April, 1349, one half of the beneficed clergy died. As a class they lived in the villages, and were in touch with the daily life of the inhabitants. They were exposed to the danger of infection, but hardly more so than other people, for it was universal. We have the evidence of the Court rolls of Chedzoy and Curry Rivel. There are also the petitions of the Charterhouses of Witham and Hinton that all their labourers were dead of the pestilence. So there seems no reason to doubt the contemporary estimate that puts the mortality of the labouring classes at half their number.

It is impossible to grasp the full horror of this statement. Even now when there is a universal shortage of labour, and every village has a roll of honour of its sons who will never return, we cannot imagine what life must have been when in a single winter's season every churchyard had received half the population of the village. There were no labour-saving contrivances, for the only machinery was human muscle. Agriculture received a setback that could not be recovered for many seasons. The main wealth was land, and that was depreciated for lack of labour.

And then there was the loss of skilled craftsmen. It may seem almost trifling to suggest that the most visible result of this loss was the rapid change from Decorated to Perpendicular in architectural styles. But it is undeniable that from the middle of the fourteenth century we can note a growing uniformity in construction, tracery, and mouldings, in striking contrast to the variety of the earlier styles. The artisan no longer invents, but only reproduces what he has been taught.

Otherwise it might seem as if nothing had really changed. Within seven years an English army had marched through France and won the great victory of Poitiers. But on the generation that had very literally passed through the valley of the shadow of death there would seem to settle a sense of desolation and despair, which comes out in the Chronicle of

Friar John Clyne of Kilkenny—"Lest things worthy of remembrance should perish with time, and fall away from the memory of those who are to come after us, I, seeing these many evils, and the whole world lying, as it were, in the wicked one, among the dead waiting for death till it come: as I have truly heard and examined, so have I reduced these things to writing; and lest the writing should perish with the writer, and the work fail together with the workman, I leave parchment for continuing the work, if haply any man survive, and any of the race of Adam escape this pestilence, and continue the work which I have commenced."

Since this paper was completed my attention has been directed to the fifth volume of *Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History*, edited by Professor Vinogradoff, 1916. It contains a "Study" on the Black Death in the estates of the See of Winchester by Miss A. E. Levett with an appendix by the late Mr. A. Ballard. By a full analysis of the Pipe Rolls of the See the authoress has built up a powerful argument against the view of the late Professor Thorold Rogers that the Pestilence produced a rapid and complete change in the agricultural and manorial system previously in possession.

The accounts of several manors contained in the large parish of St. Mary Magdalene, Taunton, as well as the separate areas of Otterford and Rimpleton, are examined in close detail; and it is clear that there was a very great though variable mortality in these manors between Michaelmas, 1348, and the same date in 1349. Unfortunately all the Court rolls for this period are wanting; and the entries in the Pipe rolls are no guide to the actual period of the mortality. Orchard (Portman) provides an extent of the manor, which came into the Bishop's hands by reason of the minority of the heir in June, 1348. This date precludes the possibility that the owner had died from the pestilence, given earlier in this paper.

The contention of Miss Levett's "Study" is far beyond my aim, which is simply to supply accurate figures as far as possible for the mortality. That this produced no sudden change seems proved. But that agricultural methods and ecclesiastical ways could be changed rapidly would be the most surprising part of the whole experience. The struggles

between the owners and the peasantry which begin after 1350 show that there was a new leaven at work, which did at length produce the change recognized by all students of the period. Dr. C. Creighton in the *Epidemics of Great Britain* compares the action of the Pestilence to the effects of a great war ; and it may well be that we shall find the reverse equally true, and that the Great War has produced a social upheaval as marked in its effect as the movements of the latter part of the fourteenth century.



