

Background Information for 'Year of Wonders'

Information Sheet 1

Regicide of Charles I

James I of England, Scotland and Ireland (The Catholic king – previously James VI of Scotland) was succeeded by his son Charles I of England in 1625. In the year before becoming King, Charles married Henrietta-Marie de Bourbon of France, a Roman Catholic daughter of Henry IV of France. Being staunchly Catholic, she refused to attend the coronation Charles II in a non-Catholic cathedral. She had no tolerance for Puritans. At the same time, William Laud, Bishop of London, was becoming increasingly powerful as an advisor to Charles. Laud viewed Puritans as a threat to orthodoxy in the church. With the Queen and Laud among his closest advisors, Charles pursued policies to eliminate the religious distinctiveness of Puritans in England. Charles was determined to eliminate the "excesses" of Puritanism from the Church of England. His close advisor Laud became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, and moved the Church of England away from Puritanism, rigorously enforcing the law against ministers who deviated from the *Book of Common Prayer* or who violated the ban on preaching about predestination.

Charles relied largely on the Star Chamber and Court of High Commission to implement his policies, adapting them as instruments to suppress the Puritans, following the later juristic methods of Elizabeth I. They were courts under the control of the King, not the Parliament, and were therefore capable of convicting and imprisoning those guilty of displeasing the King. The Puritan movement in England allied itself with the cause of "England's ancient liberties"; the unpopularity of Laud and the suppression of Puritanism was a major factor leading to the English Civil War, during which Puritans formed the backbone of the parliamentary forces. Laud was arrested in 1641 and executed in 1645, after a lengthy trial in which a large mass of evidence was brought, tending to represent him as obstructive of the "godly" and amounting to the whole, detailed Puritan case against the royal church policy of the preceding decade.

Although not the only reason for Charles' overthrow, his catholic beliefs are a major motive for the Civil War and the eventual regicide. Charles was decapitated in 1649. The Commonwealth was declared, Oliver Cromwell became Chief Protector and Puritan beliefs and way of life became the norm in England.

Puritan England

After the Parliamentary victory in the Civil War, the Puritan views of the majority of Parliament and its supporters began to be imposed on the rest of the country. The Puritans advocated an austere (that is strict, no comforts, plain) lifestyle and restricted what they saw as the excesses of the previous regime. Most prominently, holidays such as Christmas and Easter, which were thought to have pagan origins, were suppressed. Pastimes such as the theatre and gambling were also banned. However, some forms of art that were thought to be 'virtuous', such as opera, were encouraged. Oliver Cromwell, as Lord Protector, is often held to blame for the strictness of life during the Commonwealth, but most of the laws regarding lifestyle stemmed from the parliament, which was controlled by Puritans.

Cromwell's son and successor, Richard Cromwell, gave up his position as Lord Protector with little hesitation, resigning or "abdicating" after a demand by the Rump Parliament.

Restoration of Charles II

After Richard Cromwell resigned as Lord Protector, England was thrown into turmoil. The Governor of Scotland, Monck, marched an army to London and took control. A new Parliament was called which was not as Puritan heavy. This new parliament eventually recalled the son of Charles I to be the King of England, Scotland and Ireland. Charles II was crowned the King in 1661. (Interestingly, the Scottish Parliament crowned him King of Scotland in 1651)

Restoration Britain

Theatres reopened after having been closed during the protectorship of Oliver Cromwell, Puritanism lost its momentum, and the bawdy 'Restoration comedy' became a recognizable genre. In addition, women were allowed to perform on stage for the first time.

Clothing changed- the 'drabness' and use of plain colours- black, brown, grey and brown/greens were replaced with the use of vibrant colour and for women, lace. Women were allowed to talk in church. Poetry and Literature became wordly, that is it dealt with issues in politics, sex and not just taking the morally correct stance (see the poem-'To his Coy Mistress') Mathematics and philosophy were encouraged, as was medicine. The restoration was a significant shift in way of life for allin Britain, from the rich to the lower classes.

The Great Plague of London 1665-1666

A massive outbreak of disease in England that killed an estimated 100,000 people, 20% of London's population. The disease is identified as bubonic plague, an infection by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*, transmitted through a flea vector.[†] The 1665-1666 epidemic was on a far smaller scale than the earlier "Black Death" pandemic, a virulent outbreak of disease in Europe between 1347 and 1353. The plague of 1665 was only remembered afterwards as the "great" plague because it was one of the last widespread outbreaks in England.

The outbreak is thought to have spread from the Netherlands, where the bubonic plague had occurred intermittently since 1599, with the initial contagion arriving with Dutch trading ships carrying bales of cotton from Amsterdam. Amsterdam was ravaged in 1663–1664, with a mortality given as 50,000. The dock areas outside of London, and the parish of St. Giles-in-the-Fields where poor workers crowded into ill-kept structures, were the first areas struck by the plague. As records were not kept on the deaths of the very poor, the first recorded case was a Rebecca Andrews, on 12 April 1665.

By July 1665, plague was in the city of London itself. King Charles II of England, his family and his court left the city for Oxfordshire. However, the aldermen and the majority of the other city authorities opted to stay at their posts. The Lord Mayor of the city, Sir John Lawrence also decided to stay in the city. Businesses were closed when most wealthy merchants and professionals fled. Only a small number of clergymen, physicians and apothecaries chose to remain, as the plague raged throughout the summer. Among the people who chose to stay were Samuel Pepys, the diarist, and Henry Foe, a saddler who lived in East London. While Pepys provides an account of the Plague through his diary, Henry Foe's nephew Daniel Defoe published *A Journal of the Plague Year*, a fictional account of the plague in 1722, possibly based on Foe's journals.

Plague doctors would traverse the streets, diagnosing victims, although many of them were unqualified physicians. Several public health efforts were attempted. Physicians were hired by city officials, and burial details were carefully organized. But panic spread through the city, and in the fear of contagion, people were hastily buried in overcrowded pits. The City Corporation ordered a cull of dogs and cats - a poor decision, since those animals kept the population of rats (the real culprits) in check. Authorities ordered fires to be kept burning night and day, in hopes that the air would be cleansed. Substances giving off strong odours, such as pepper, hops or frankincense, were also burned, in an attempt to ward off the infection.

London residents were strongly urged to smoke tobacco.

Though concentrated in London, the outbreak affected other areas of the country. Perhaps the most famous example was the village of Eyam in Derbyshire. The plague allegedly arrived with a merchant carrying a parcel of cloth sent from London, although this is a disputed fact. The villagers imposed a quarantine on themselves to stop the further spread of the disease. Spread of the plague was slowed in surrounding areas, but the cost to the village was the death of around 75% of its inhabitants.

Records state that deaths in London crept up to 1,000 people per week, then 2,000 people per week and, by September 1665, to 7,000 people per week. By late autumn, the death toll began to slow until, in February 1666, it was considered safe enough for the King and his entourage to return to the city. By this time, however, trade with the European continent had spread this outbreak of plague to France, where it died out the following winter.

Plague cases continued at a modest pace until September 1666. On 2 and 3 September, the Great Fire of London destroyed much of the centre of London. At about the same time, the plague outbreak tapered off. Although, it is now thought that the Plague had died off before the Great Fire of London and also the majority of plague cases were found in the suburbs of the city and not in the centre of London that was affected by the Fire.

The Plague Village of Eyam

Eyam is a small village in Derbyshire, England. The village is best known for being the "plague village" that chose to isolate itself when the plague was discovered there in August 1665, rather than let the infection spread. The village was founded and named by Anglo-Saxons, although lead had been mined in the area by the Romans.

The plague had been brought to the village in a flea-infested bundle of cloth that was delivered to tailor George Viccars from London.

Within a week he was dead and was buried on 7 September 1665. After the initial deaths, the townspeople turned to their rector, the Reverend William Mompesson, and the Puritan Minister Thomas Stanley. They introduced a number of precautions to slow the spread of the illness from May 1665. These included the arrangement that families were to bury their own dead and the relocation of church services from the parish church of St. Lawrence to Cucklett Delph to allow villagers to separate themselves, reducing the risk of infection. Perhaps the best-known decision was to quarantine the entire village to prevent further spread of the disease. The plague raged in the village for 16 months and it is stated that it killed at least 260 villagers with only 83 villagers surviving out of a population of 350. This figure has been

challenged on a number of occasions with alternative figures of 430 survivors from a population of around 800 being given.

When the first outsiders visited Eyam a year later, they found that fewer than a quarter of the village had survived the plague. Survival appeared random, as many plague survivors had close contact with the bacterium but never caught the disease. For example, Elizabeth Hancock never became ill despite burying six children and her husband in eight days (the graves are known as the Riley graves). The unofficial village gravedigger Marshall Howe also survived, despite handling many infected bodies, as he had earlier survived catching the disease.

Landed Gentry

English is a society made up of many classes, from the King and the other nobles at the top to the poor commoner at the bottom. The term 'landed gentry' refers to a group, a high class of people that, although they are not Lords/Barons/Dukes etc, they own land and earn an income by renting it out to others. Landed gentry is a traditional British social class consisting of "gentlemen" in the original sense; that is, those who owned land in the form of country estates to such an extent that they were not required to actively work, except in an administrative capacity on their own lands. The estates were often (but not always) made up of tenanted farms, in which case the gentleman could live entirely off rental income.

Avicenna

Abū Alī Sīnā, commonly known in English by his Latinized name **Avicenna** was a Muslim mathematician and the foremost physician and philosopher of his time. He was also an astronomer, chemist, geologist, Hafiz, Islamic psychologist, Islamic scholar and Islamic theologian.

Avicenna studied medicine under a physician named Koushyar. He wrote almost 450 books on a wide range of subjects, of which around 240 have survived. In particular, 150 of his surviving treatises concentrate on philosophy and 40 of them concentrate on medicine. His most famous works are *The Book of Healing*, a vast philosophical and scientific encyclopaedia, and *The Canon of Medicine*, which was a standard medical text at many medieval universities. The *Canon of Medicine* was used as a text-book in the universities of Montpellier and Louvain as late as 1650.