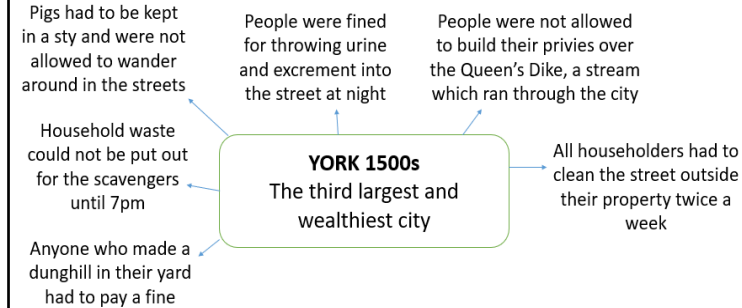


People's Health Knowledge Organiser

Early Modern (1500-1750)

Changes to York's laws about health, 1500s



Life in the early modern period

Food and famine

Rich people ate lots of meat, enjoyed white bread and only ate small amounts vegetables and fruit. New products were introduced from other countries so if you could afford it, you could buy sugar, potatoes and pumpkins. The poor continued to eat bread, vegetables, eggs and pottage. By 1750 there were over 500 coffee houses in London. The religious custom of eating fish on a Friday continued. The population doubled from 3 million in 1550 to 6 million in 1750 but improvements in farming meant that there was just enough food for everyone.

Urban environment

People bought food from shops, markets and street sellers. Food didn't stay fresh for long and food poisoning was common. People shared the streets with animals as cattle, geese and sheep were herded through the streets. Rats and mice flourished. Streets were sometimes cobbled but covered in dung. Houses were poorly constructed and were draughty and damp. This meant that people suffered from breathing problems.

Water

Access to water became more difficult as the town grew. There were three main ways to get water: 1) Pay for water to be piped to your house 2) Collecting water from conduits. 3) Buying water from a water seller.

In the countryside, people carried water from wells, springs or streams.

Waste

People who lived in towns could put waste like food, paper, sweepings and ash outside their homes in a basket or tub. Once or twice a week, it was collected by 'scavengers' who sold waste to gardeners outside of towns. In the countryside, little changed but in towns, getting rid of human waste became a problem. Cesspits were emptied once or twice a year by scavengers, usually at night. Poorer people sometimes emptied their own cesspits.

The gin craze

There was a growth in the number of alehouses and drunkenness was a problem. Puritans were concerned and wrote pamphlets attacking the drink.

1550: Councils tried to control alehouses by making it illegal to sell alcohol without a license.

After 1660: In London, 'dram shops' opened selling cheap spirits.

1689: Parliament banned the import of gin. Gin became cheap. Thousands of small 'gin shops' opened in cellars, back rooms, attics and sheds. Some even sold it from barrows.

By the 1720s, gin was a big problem in London. Poor men and women turned to gin to escape the lack of work and poor living conditions.

1729: Parliament made a law to control gin drinking: gin distillers had to pay a tax of five shillings on each gallon of gin they made and gin sellers had to buy a licence.

1736: The government passed a harsher Act. Licences went up to £50 and the tax was increased. It was easy for the shops to hide what they were doing.

1743: Another Gin Act was passed, this restricted the sale of gin to alehouses who already sold ale, beer and wine.

1751: The government introduced another law. Anyone caught selling gin illegally was imprisoned and whipped for a second offence. A third offence resulted in transportation.

Plague

Frequency

Plague never went away, there were at least 8 big outbreaks from 1500-1670.

Symptoms

The first sign was a blister where the victim had been bitten by a flea. The victim's temperature rose to 40°C. This was followed by headaches, vomiting, thirst and pain. The lymph nodes in the groin, armpit or neck swelled with pus and formed large buboes. The heart and kidneys failed and the victim became delirious. After the flea bite the victim died within five days.

Impact

Plague struck suddenly and began with the arrival of warmer weather. When rats and fleas flourished, deaths increased. Plague often killed 10% of a community in less than a year.

Nobody understood it

Medical knowledge about the cause made little progress. People believe it was caused by God/miasma. At the end of the 17th century, some believed in contagion which was contact with an infected person. There was no understanding of the role of rats and fleas.

Reactions

Church attendance increased when plague threatened and many tried to run away.

Seeking a cure: From the late 16th C, physicians and apothecaries were more common. Many fled. Those who stayed wore cloaks, hoods and leather beaks stuffed with herbs.

Avoiding the sick: People were reluctant to take food to a victim's house. Maids and servants were sometimes thrown out on the streets. In some cases people looked for people to blame and foreigners and beggars were attacked.

Sticking together: Few people abandoned members of their immediate family. Parents looked after children. Husband and wives stayed together. The elderly took in orphans.

The impact of local government on public health, 1670-1750

After 1670, towns no longer had to worry about plague. Instead they could concentrate on improving their environment. By 1750, several water companies in London and other towns piped water to the homes of those who could afford it. From 1670-1750, local authorities made improvements to their towns to cope with the growing number of people, carriages and carts.

- Many towns encouraged builders to construct streets and squares of large terraced housing where wealthy people could live.
- Oil burning lamps first appeared in London in the 1680s and by 1750 most towns had lighting in their main street.

Town councils made improvements because they wanted to make life more pleasant. Health wasn't their concern. In the period before 1750, the connection between dirt and disease had not been made. In the poorer areas streets were unpaved and unlit; people had to fetch water from a conduit or buy it from a water cart. For everyone, sewage disposal had hardly improved. It would be another hundred years before sewers removed the problem of stinking, overflowing cesspits.

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS

1476 The printing press was introduced. This meant information could spread more easily.	1518 Houses with plague in London were identified. Straw should be hung from windows of infected houses for 40 days.	1578 17 plague orders were printed and sent to towns.	1604 Punishments for breaking isolation. A plague victim found outside their house could be hanged.	1665-6 The Great Plague of London. This was the last major epidemic of the bubonic plague.	1665 Travellers brought news that plague was raging, so Cambridge introduced measures to stop plague.	1680s Oil burning lamps first appeared in London.	1712 The Newcomen engine was invented. They were used to pump water out of coal mines.	1743 Gin Act. This wasn't effective.	1751 A much tougher Gin Act was introduced.
--	--	---	---	--	---	---	--	--	---