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23

THE BLACK DEATH IN COVENTRY

by

Arthur Gooder

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Coventry and County Heritage Series
Booklet No.23

COVENTRY AT THE TIME OF THE BLACK DEATH

COVENTRY ARCHIVES

Arthur Gooder

With a new introduction by Eileen Gooder and Mary H.M. Hulton

Published by
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Editorial Note

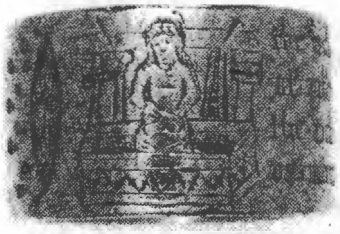
It is with great pleasure that the Coventry Branch of the Historical Association publishes the pioneering work of the late Dr Arthur Gooder (1909-1992) on Coventry at the time of the Black Death. Dr Gooder, working on this subject in the 1960's, used approaches which at the time were innovative and in the forefront of contemporary research techniques. He investigated records of the medieval plague to identify possible patterns of development which could be applied to the Coventry experience and derived excellent statistics from the limited sources for the city at this disturbed and troubled time. Dr Gooder was a historian who looked carefully for the traces of evidence from sources which, superficially, might appear unhelpful. His scholarship was derived from a painstaking

and careful analysis of such sources and the ability to interpret them against a deeply researched background of the contemporary scene.

Dr Gooder's research has been prepared for publication by Dr. M.Hulton, formerly a member of the Coventry History Research Group whose overall contribution is acknowledged in the pamphlet. The introduction includes an article by Dr Hulton which sets Dr Gooder's research in the framework of the most recent opinions and conclusions about the Black Death. It is followed by an overview of the plague and its consequences by Mrs Eileen Gooder whose guidance and insight not only helped to inspire the original research but has also helped to bring the present publication to fruition.

Finally my personal thanks as general editor are given to Mr L.Hulton whose expertise in the mysteries of computer-based editing has contributed much to the successful launching of this pamphlet.

Eileen Castle, General Series Editor



This Fifteenth century mourning ring, which was dug up, by chance in the Coventry Park in 1802, was a luxury object, possibly produced in the workshop of a prominent London goldsmith, Sir Edmund Shaa. Its design concerns the Five Wounds of Christ, prominent in the beliefs of the Corpus Christi Gild. pp. 17 and 45.

Figure 1 The Coventry ring:- late Medieval piety

Introduction

The Plague in the Twentieth Century Reality and Opinion

"Plague Fears Haunt City" - thus read a local headline for September 30th 1994. The city in question was Birmingham and the fears arose from eight passengers who had landed in England, feeling unwell, after flying from India where Plague had broken out a few days before. Later it appeared that the people concerned had, in fact, been struck down by flu; but an international panic continued to be reported by the press for another week and Surat, the city where the outbreak was centred, was said to have been abandoned by at least 500,000 of its inhabitants, starting with the more affluent middle classes; those naturally least at risk. Nonetheless, in this period, further small scale outbreaks occurred elsewhere in India, including its capital, Delhi, before antibiotic treatment and public hygiene measures appear to have brought the whole episode under control in about ten days.[1]

The speed of treatment and control mark out this twentieth century event from previous manifestations of the dread disease - through many millennia.[2] However, as in the past, the organism responsible for the various forms of 'plague' or 'Black Death' (Yersinia pestis) is likely to continue to mutate and so bring disaster to poverty-ridden areas and, in its wake, to promote panic far and wide.[3]

Writing in 1996, P.J.P.Goldberg[4] used a different modern parallel, that of AIDS, to emphasise the concept of helplessness felt by earlier generations faced with an undefined and untreatable threat of infection. No single late-Twentieth century parallel will go more than a short distance to kindle our imagination, but such parallels do begin to give us a way to enter into the lives of Coventry people six and a half centuries ago.

This pamphlet (No. 23 in our series) deals, of course, with much more than the progress of this dreaded epidemic, for its subject is, rightly, a general consideration of the life of the city at this early phase. Fourteenth century Coventry has not been altogether well-served by its historians. There are honorable exceptions; for

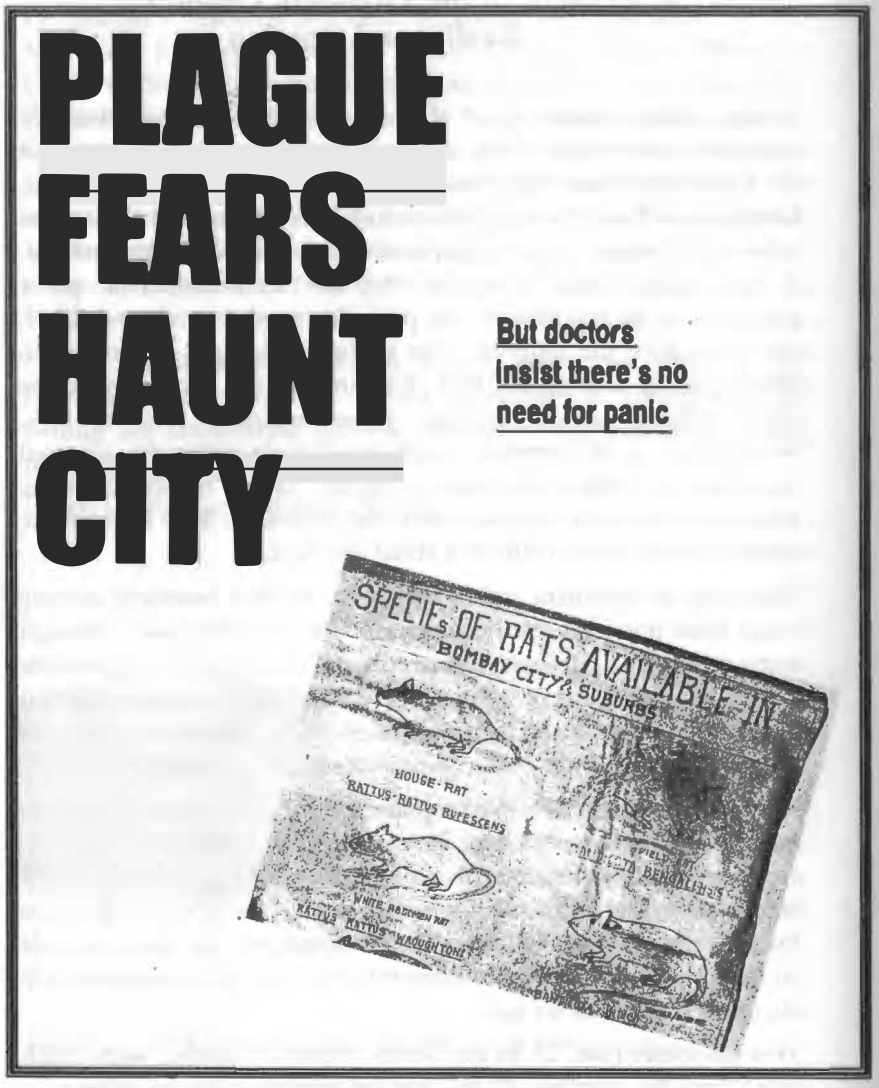


Illustration I 20th century Plague.

example, in the early writings of Benjamin Poole and Mary Dormer Harris and the definitive account contained in the more recent Vol. VIII of the Victoria History of Warwickshire.[5] However, each of these was attempting a long term narrative of the city's evolution; whereas in the more recent scholarly fashion, in which particular issues are developed in detail, with the use of contemporary documentation, historians have tended to concentrate on rather earlier or later periods.

To this, the work of both Arthur Gooder and Peter Coss have been important exceptions.[6] However, these two have mostly written, so far, about the development of the government of Coventry in its complex and controversial earlier phases. The piece of work printed here helps to make good a shortfall at a crucial point in the history of the people of the city.

Although the gist of the following text derives from a lecture given over thirty years ago, subsequently revised and updated by Arthur Gooder himself, yet it is still substantially novel both in its content and approach: and the editor does not believe that the text, as it stands, requires any further 'improvement'. However, as in almost all disciplines, historical research marches relentlessly on and there is, now, scope to provide some additions.

The original work, as can be seen elsewhere, was carried out in a class held under the supervision of both Eileen and Arthur Gooder. Eileen not only provided equal inspiration and guidance for us, the members of the group as we became familiarised with the complexities of palaeography and Medieval Latin; she is also the mainspring of the present project and, as such, has written the next section of this introductory addition. This is followed by some consideration of how historians' thinking has developed more generally in the interim on other relevant topics. To complete the updating process an additional bibliography is to be found at the end of the main section. [See Editor's Note on Bibliography p.55]

Perhaps it should be re-emphasised here that the charm, creative imagination and individuality of the central text is very much a product of Arthur Gooder's personality, as we all knew him - while the mistakes or omissions in the remainder of the work are wholly down to the Editor.

Mary Hulton

The Impact of the Black Death of the Fourteenth Century

The very name, the Black Death, has sinister overtones even today, though it is over six hundred years since the catastrophic disease swept over Europe and the British Isles, leaving at least a third of the population dead.

What was this devastating disease? Some of the medieval chroniclers have described some of the symptoms, the 'buboes' (boil-like swellings in the armpit or groin of the victims) establishing beyond reasonable doubt that it was bubonic plague, which can be 60% to 90% fatal. But; it can develop into two other forms, one attacking the lungs, when death was almost certain in two or three days; moreover the coughing this brought on, and the associated droplets, mean that this form, the pneumonic, is the most highly infectious. A third form infests the blood, and this, the septicaemic variation, is the most deadly of all, causing certain death in a matter of hours.[7]

It is only in modern times that the mechanism of the plague has been understood. In some remote areas of central Asia the plague bacillus lingers on, particularly in the stomach of a flea (Xenopsylla cheopsis) which in turn tends to live upon the black rat. Certain conditions, such as drought, or overpopulation of rats, may cause them to migrate, taking their infected fleas with them. The rats themselves may become infected and die leaving their parasites gorged with infected blood which they cannot digest, to seek another host, possibly human, and so transmit the plague.

To medieval man, ignorant of the causes, the plague must have been doubly terrifying. At best, they supposed that in some places the air was corrupt; commonly it was thought to be a visitation from God as punishment for their sins and the cult of the Flagellants sprang from this - processions of hysterical penitents lashing themselves with whips, particularly on the Continent.

It is thought that a ship brought the first plague victim to a south coast port (possibly Southampton, or Melcombe Regis, Dorset) in June or July 1348 and that by the middle of August it began to develop its pneumonic and septicaemic forms and spread rapidly.

There are no easy methods of discovering the death-rates. Parish registers were still more than two hundred years in the future, and other written records have to be pressed into use. Bishops made registers of the institution and deaths of beneficed clergy and of the vacancy of their livings, and these are perhaps the best guide to the mortality of that dreadful year. For the dioceses of York, Lincoln, Coventry and Lichfield the death rate of the clergy amounted to 40%. Manorial records may show the deaths of tenants due to pay death duties (heriots), and for certain manors in Hampshire, Wiltshire and (Oxfordshire figures as high as two-thirds can be derived). But inquisitions after the deaths of major landholders (Inquisitions Post Mortem) yield a figure of 27%.

These, however, were a privileged class, living in stone houses which would be less rat-ridden; moreover they would be more able to flee badly stricken areas than the ordinary run of folk. Professor J.F.D. Shrewsbury, a medical historian, has made a study of plagues, and for the Black Death has arrived at a figure of about 5% mortality, coupled with doubts about whether the Black Death and later plagues can have been bubonic. But this is so much at variance with the conclusions of most other historians that it must be viewed with the greatest reserve.[8]

We may not be able to recover the exact statistics, but there is no doubt about the profound effect upon the lives of the people. Sometimes when a tenant died there was no successor to take on the tenancy; land might go uncultivated and grass take over arable fields; some windmills were abandoned for lack of millers to work them; cheap land was available for energetic, enterprising survivors; peasants who had formerly been obliged to pay labour dues as well as money for their land, to expend their energies on the lords land to the neglect of their own, were now in a strong position to demand freedom from these servile duties; labourers were able to demand higher wages. These effects relate to the population living on and by the land. On the village green of Priddy, the highest village in Somerset, is a faint echo of the dislocation of daily life caused by the plague. A small thatched shelter houses a pile of wooden hurdles with an accompanying inscription: "These hurdles are a symbolic symbolic reconstruction of the original collection which were stored here to form the pens for the sheep fair which was moved from Wells to Priddy at the

outbreak of the Black Death". Was the pure air of the Mendips thought to be more wholesome ?

By contrast, it is important to consider the impact of the plague on a densely populated town, on Coventry, in fact, which is the subject of this study.

Eileen Gooder

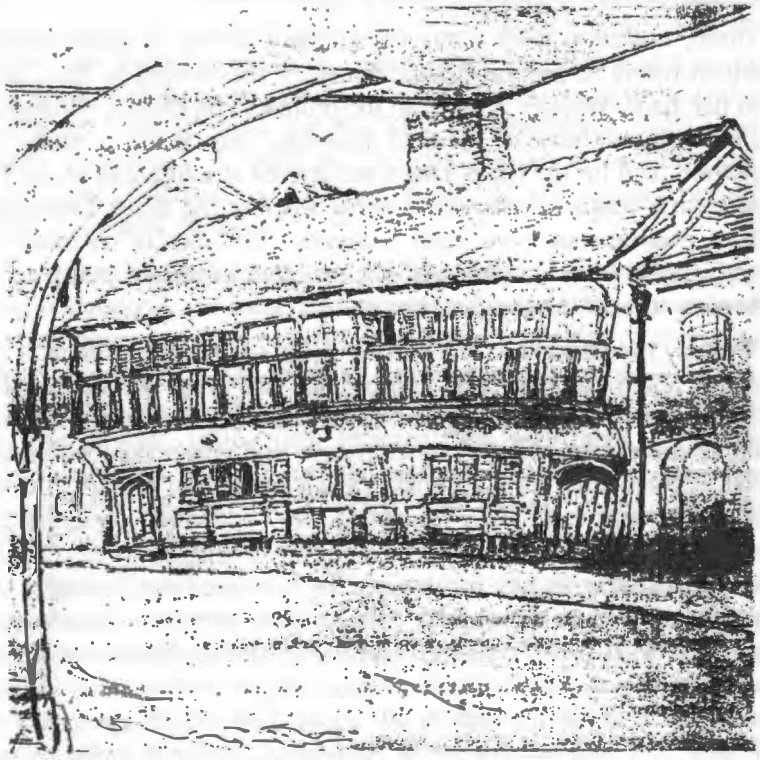


Illustration II House in Little Park Street

Development of ideas.

It must be assumed, though it is not absolutely certain, that after the mid - Seventeenth century the Black Death did not return as a recurrent disease to these islands.[9] It became part of our history. A great deal of medical and historic controversy continues to rage around this fact. Can we be sure that it will never return ? Will our antibiotic resources continue to keep it at bay, or, as is the case of Tuberculosis, will mutant strains emerge (perhaps among distant animal populations) that will trigger a whole new world-wide epidemic? At the turn of the second Christian millennium, we are perhaps a good deal less certain about these things than we were a few decades ago, when antibiotics were first introduced. Moreover, as with other organisms (such as those which have produced B.S.E. or 'bird' flu) we are still not certain about the vectors or agents which transmit the plague. Does Yersinia pestis really cross into human populations from animals and, if so, how ? In general it is still believed to come from the rat flea (though this is not now thought to be a universal cause.) Pneumonic plague, though, we know must be a means of deadly human - to - human transmission. But how important is, or was, the apparently uncommon septicaemic form which could appear to cause almost instant death? In relation to the panics that sudden deaths, among other things, might cause, we can read below that, in the period during and immediately after the last appearance of the Plague, many written accounts were, understandably more like "hysterical or superstitious outbursts," than history as we know it. Even in the last century, tales such as the Victorian writer, William Wood's, dramatic account of the Seventeenth - century outbreak in Eyam are histrionic and compelling rather than reliable.[10]

However, in the last hundred or more years, historians have gradually learnt to base the drama and excitement on more carefully assessed factual evidence - and have, in the process, found a good deal to disagree about. Eileen Gooder touches on one such problem in her account above. Five years after the original lecture on Coventry at the time of the Black Death, Professor J.F.D. Shrewsbury published a very fully researched and wide ranging 'History of the Bubonic Plague' in which he put forward individual and novel ideas which, whatever their other merits, helped to act as

the focus for a whole range of alternative suggestions. Perhaps the most crucial of Shrewsbury's concepts was the theory of 'mistaken attribution' i.e. that, because medical diagnosis could never be thought of as reliable before the Nineteenth century and because, as we have seen, precise diagnosis of the plague can still, occasionally, be shaky, then 'plague' might be used to cover a whole range of other epidemics and so artificially inflate subsequent accounts of its extent and terror. He did not deny that 'Yersinia pestis' was the main cause of the great epidemic of the late Fourteenth century, but still tried to reduce estimates of the figures of mortality to a very low level.

In general, as with many aspects of his thought, others have not followed this very closely, but it has persuaded them, for instance, to define exactly what pattern of events various epidemics, (typhus, anthrax, dysentery and so on) other than the plague, can be expected to produce. In the case of the outbreak of bubonic plague in Fourteenth century Coventry, the progress and impact of the disease is clearly revealed here and can now be shown to parallel closely studies of comparable events undertaken subsequently in other areas. In particular, we can note Roger Schofield's account, published in 1977, of a Seventeenth century outbreak in the Devonshire market town of Colyton. This appeared alongside studies of other communities including Bristol and Eyam, to name only a few of a range of places whose detailed study (including Gloucester, Ely and above all, London) have, over the years, both modified and clarified the wider picture. Now Coventry can, with full justification, be added to their number.[11]

In each of these instances the characteristic features of the plague in its initial and bubonic form can be accurately identified and the severity of its nature substantially assessed, but elsewhere severe epidemics are now revealed to show separate 'hallmarks' as they progress. An article which analysed mortality of epidemic proportions in the remote agricultural region of Seventeenth century Cumberland and Westmorland,[12] (published in 1973) showed the cause to be crop failure and the subsequent famine; indirectly also helping to verify the true occurrence of plague at other times.

The change of emphasis, away from over-generalisation, has also affected studies of the Black Death in European countries where, in some instances, much fuller contemporary accounts of the coming

of the plague and its effects still survive. Outstanding among works of this sort are the descriptions of plague-ridden Florence by Carlo Cipolla and the most recent, masterly, description by A.G.Carmichael of a whole spectrum of experiences of the rich and poor of a great European city.[13]

Outside London, English towns never acquired such rich contemporary accounts. Indeed, writing of Coventry, England's fourth or fifth greatest city at this time, Arthur Gooder explains, that he was not, essentially, working with any direct evidence of the plague at all. What he does though, through the use of formal and routine legal documents, is to plot very skilfully the arrival and progress of a great epidemic, rather as archaeologists now study the traces in soil for the sign of vanished buildings. The most important of these documentary traces is the written evidence of the survival or non-survival of boundary owners, revealing not only a huge rise in mortality, but a sequence of events which closely resembles the known progress of the plague in other communities and a level of mortality which makes very interesting comparison with events elsewhere.

The overall mortality rates thus suggested for Coventry do not reflect very low figures, such as Shrewsbury claimed (5%) or the very high across-the-board levels, which may sometimes have occurred in other communities. One thing which these recent local and medical studies do now reveal is just how eccentric and unpredictable the pattern of the progress of the plague could be. Yet once more the estimate of Coventry's over-all death-rate (perhaps 21%) fits in well with more recent findings. Even more interestingly, perhaps, the suggestion of selectively high outbreaks in poorer and crowded areas such as Spon Street also matches the studies in Bristol and Colyton mentioned above. As in Nineteenth-century London's cholera epidemics or the late 20th century plague in Surat, it was the overcrowded courts of the poor which suffered most.

What of the aftermath of the main epidemic ? If the immediate catastrophe was very great, what were the long term consequences ? This pamphlet does not, quite rightly, go into this additional theme at great length. It is perhaps the topic most hotly contested by many contemporary writers; - and is still unresolved between those who, (as in the most recent work to hand - 1996[14]) see it as the

departure point for a much more complex series of changes, in which the Black Death played a substantial part, but is far from the only, or even the major factor - and those who still wish to emphasise the effect of the plague before all else.

However, once again, this account of events in Coventry very much fits the main views of historians of the 1990's. In the short-term, as in other communities, a good economic recovery is evident from the improving value of better-class property. The present writer would add that this is also clearly reflected in Coventry's continuous rise as a commercial and industrial town or city of the first rank.[15]

In the longer-term, a much more profound change occurred in property ownership in the city. However much we wish to cling to a belief in legends of 'Dances of Death' and the universal dread that came with the plague; what is really gripping in this account is the steady nerve and practical common-sense of those faced with actuality; an actuality as in the touching and tragic tale of the young heiress, Joan Arthingworth, whose already widowed mother saw her (only?) child following her husband to an early grave.[16] It is now an established fact that the greatest risk occurred within the family home - a grim reality rather than an abstract statistic for those within whose household the first plague death had already occurred.[17] Even in this desperate situation, though, care and prudence prevailed. Property was still cared for and, faute de mieux, much of it found its way into the hands of the religious institutions. Again, this widespread phenomenon takes a particular local form. Coventry's guilds, those groups of merchants, craftsmen and others, who formed some of the most powerful groups in the life of the society of the city:- and who offered a supportive passage into eternal life, through the funeral rites, for many more, were the principal recipients of land and property of those who could no longer be certain of their own or their families' future. As a result, the Guilds' power and wealth was enormously enhanced between the Black Death and the Dissolution of the Sixteenth century.[18]

It may be only a slight exaggeration to regard the late-medieval change in land and property arising directly from epidemic, as being at least as important in Coventry's rise to international importance as the better-known acquisition of royal patronage from

without and commercial thrust from within. At the very least, the pamphlet is sure to make a very valuable addition to a national and international debate on an important topic.

Mary Hulton.

Endnotes to the Introduction

1 See reports in the local and national press from 26th September – 4th October 1994.

2 The detailed long-term derivation of 'Yersinia pestis' is, at present, less than well-established. Both Shrewsbury [30] and Biraben (note 3 below) discuss possible derivations from Ancient Egypt and the lands of the Fertile Crescent, but *"Plague in Seventh Century England"* J.R. Maddicott in *"Past and Present"* 1997 No.156 pp.7-54 shows how far knowledge has developed in the last twenty years in this respect.

3 [32] Slack See Biraben p.33 *"The Plague Reconsidered"* reproduced from *"Les Hommes et la Peste"* (Paris 1975-76)

[31] Slack *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* pp 7-17 contains a very clear and comprehensive discussion of all elements of possible means and circumstances of the transmission of the plague.

4 Introduction to [26] Ormrod and Lindley

5 Benjamin Poole *"History of Coventry"* (1870)

Mary Dormer Harris ed. *"Coventry Leet Book"* (London 1907-13)

Some of this is conveyed in narrative form in her *"Life in an Old English Town"* (1898)

"Victoria County History of Warwickshire" Vol. VIII (London 1907-13)

6 See below n.10 (Introduction. p.14)

and also Notes 18 and 31 in Endnotes to Main text

7 See a recent account of aspects of plague variants in Horrox [20] Introduction.

[8] See in particular Morris [26], comments on p.11, and Horrox as in n.6 above.

[9] [30] Shrewsbury concluded that the last recorded outbreak was in Cornwall in 1671.

[10] [32] Slack. See Bradley

[11] [32] Schofield pp. 95-126 (Colyton), Slack pp. 49-62 (Bristol), Bradley pp. 63-94 (Eyam)

[20] Holt (Gloucester)

[1] Aberth (Ely) Like the only other published work which concerns Coventry's visitation of the plague - [9] Davies - this is concerned with the recorded mortality among the clergy.

[16] Hawkins

[19] Hollingsworth (London)

also references, passim, in [4] Britnell.

[12] [2] Appleby.

[13] [6] Carmichael (N.B. very comprehensive Bibliography in this work.)

C.Cipolla e.g. *Christofano and the Plague* (London 1973)

Fighting the Plague in Seventeenth century Italy (Madison 1981)

[14] [27] Ormrod and Lindley, See Jim Bolton *The World Upside Down* pp.17-78.

[15] The origins of this are definitively recorded in *The Early Records of Medieval Coventry* ed. P.D.Coss (Especially pp. xxx-xliii)

An outline of its later progress is contained in an earlier number in this series, No. 21 *True as Coventry Blue* Mary Hulton

The deeds in the C.R.O. seem to rule out any possibility of a recurrence of the epidemic, as occurred in some areas.

[16] See below p.39 and pp.46-47

[17] [32] See Schofield on Colyton, as above n. 10

[18] [4] Britnell.

COVENTRY AT THE TIME OF THE BLACK DEATH AND AFTERWARDS

The text of a paper read by Arthur Gooder to the Dugdale Society on 16 October 1965.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For help in the preparation of this paper I am indebted to David Rimmer, Coventry City Archivist, and Michael Hinman, Assistant Archivist; and, especially, to Professor Peter Coss for fostering its publication.

The editors are indebted to Margaret Rylatt of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum for supplying the background information on the Coventry Ring. p.4

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Coventry City Council, for the Troughton Drawing of Well Street Houses (Accession I, Vol. III, No 5), and the University of Warwick, History of Art Photograph Library, for their photograph of the same. [Illustration IV]

Coventry City council for reproductions of seals in their possession, (Joan Arthingwortht's deed –BA/D/BH/1/2, and St Mary's Gild.) [Illustration VI]

The Dugdale Society for the seal of Holy Trinity Gild (Dugdale Society, Vol. XIII) [Illustration VI]

John Hinde Ltd, for photograph of stained glass (Fear of the Plague Front Cover Illustration.)

Coventry Evening Telegraph, for photographs of Little and Great Butcher Rows. [Illustration III and Illustration VIII]

Mrs P. Richardson, for Robert Overy's drawing of the Old Grammar School. [Illustration VII]

Woodcut of Coronation of Virgin is from M.D. Harris, Life in an Old English Town (1898); House in Little Park Street, from M.D. Harris,(ed.) [Illustration II]

Photograph of The Oak by E.A. Gooder [Illustration V]

The principal sources were the Corporation deeds of the year 23 Edward III, 1-175

Wellstood, F.C., ed. The Lay Subsidy for Warwickshire of 6 Edw. III...(Dugdale Society, Vol. VI (1926)

Hundred Roll Coventry 1280: photostat copies of folios 100-114 of the composite Ms volume in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office, Stratford upon Avon) DR 18/31/3

[See, also, Endnotes to the Introduction. n.14]

Harris, M.D., Life in an old English Town (1898)

Harris, M.D., ed. The Register of the Guild of the Holy Trinity... (Dugdale Society, Vol. XIII, 1935)

Coventry History Research Group

Beginning in 1958 as a one-year introduction to Records, under the aegis of the University of Birmingham Department of Extramural Studies, this group developed into a research group with, initially, a three year commitment. It met at the City Record Office and worked on Coventry City documents under the guidance of Dr Arthur Gooder, with, for some time, his wife Mrs E. Gooder as assistant. It continued under Dr Gooder's tutorship until his retirement in 1973, since when it has continued in existence under other tutors. The paper is partly based on the work of the many members of the group, and their help is gratefully acknowledged. The list of names include the following. That passage of time has prevented its being fully complete, will, we hope, meet with forgiveness.

A.F.	Adams	O.	Edwards
D.W.	Alder	Mrs. B.	Forrer
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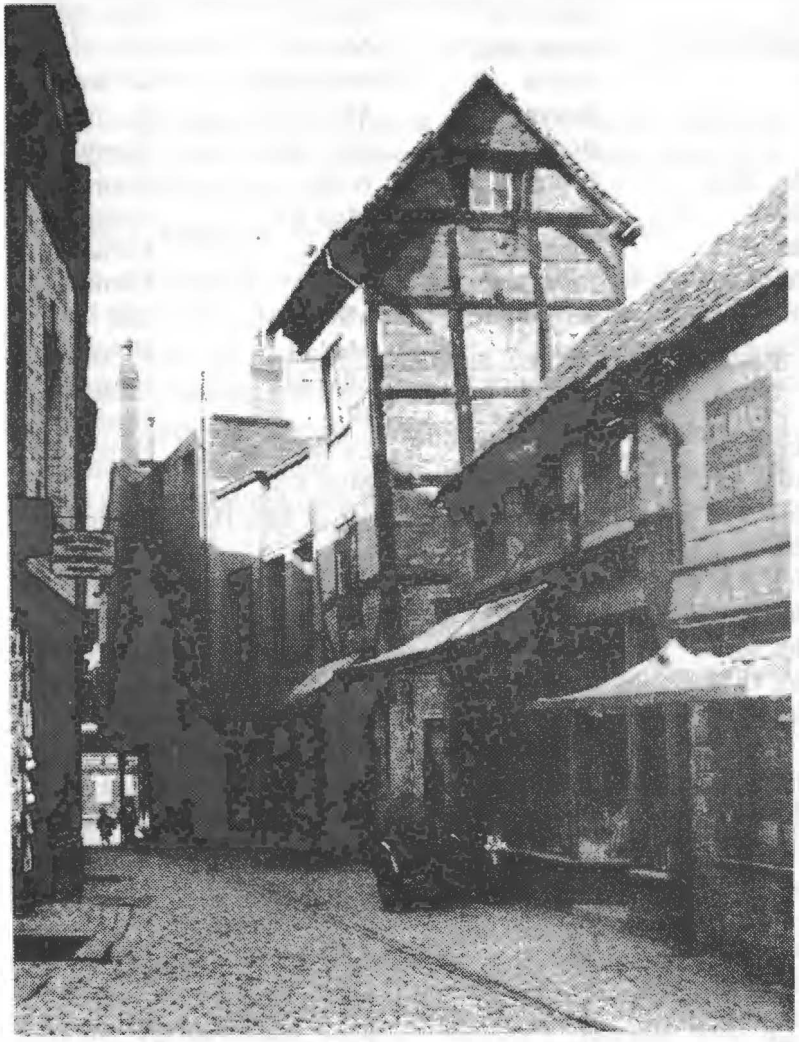


Illustration III Little Butcher Row

Coventry at the time of the Black Death and afterwards.

The Growing Community

It is only with the foundation of the Benedictine Monastery by Leofric and Godiva in 1043 that the history of the city, as distinct from tradition and speculation, can be said to begin. The charter of Edward the Confessor confirming Leofric's munificence, is now believed to be a forgery, but there is no reason to doubt that the Abbey was endowed with a considerable proportion of Leofric's and Godiva's lands, and for over three centuries Coventry was divided into the Prior's part and the Earl's part.[19] At this time Coventry was a rather large village, but by the late 12th century, when the men of the Earl's part got a charter of liberties from the Earl of Chester, (now lord of Coventry amongst many other lands, through the gift of the Conqueror) there was a community of craftsmen and traders. The charter recognised them as free burgesses, and promised protection and justice to merchants coming into the town. Immigrants were encouraged by being exempt from all taxes for two years from the time when they began to build a house in Coventry, and by 1332 the city was the 19th wealthiest in England, according to the assessments made for the Subsidy of that year.[20]

How much did immigration contribute to the growth of Coventry, and where did the new citizens come from ? We have tried to find out by studying the surnames of people mentioned in local documents of the time. Surnames, of course, originate in the need to distinguish, for example, one man named John from a dozen other Johns in the same town. A John, born and brought up in Warwick might be surnamed 'the Strong', 'the Smith', 'William's son', or 'at the Gate', but not usually John of Warwick, so long as he continued to live there. But if he moved to Coventry, the Coventrians might at once take to calling him 'John of Warwick'. In this way, Henry at the Cross who lived at Grandon near

Atherstone, became Henry de Grandon when he moved to Coventry. Similarly, of two brothers in Arley, Robert, who stayed at home was called 'the Millward', but Thomas who moved to Coventry was known there as 'Thomas de Arley'. In a mediæval community which has grown by immigration, therefore, we shall expect to find a large number of people named after the places from which they or their ancestors came.[21]

Five hundred and eighty-six individuals are mentioned in documents written in Coventry in 1349, the year of the Black Death. They bore three hundred and seventy-five different surnames, nearly half of which (176) were derived from places. Three hundred and eleven people had this sort of surname. Had the immigration stopped by the 14th century or was the town still a magnet for the enterprising and hopeful, or perhaps the merely dissatisfied ? We have tried to answer this question by looking at the surnames of people in possession of houses or land in Coventry, as given in the Hundred Rolls of 1280.[22] Four hundred and eleven of these have been identified, of whom a hundred and twenty-nine had surnames derived from place-names. Thus, in 1280, about 31% of the population appear to be immigrants or descendants of immigrants, while in 1349 the percentage of incomers is over 51%. Clearly then, immigration had not stopped by 1280, and it is likely that people were still coming in increasingly up to the time of the Black Death.

Where did they all come from ? Some bore names of places which it is difficult to identify with certainty. Did Richard Facham, for instance, come from Feckenham (Worcs), Fakenham in Norfolk, Fetcham in Surrey or Fawkham in Kent ? Was William de Sutton from Sutton Coldfield or one of the many other Suttons in England? However, when we have discarded many names as doubtful, we still have over one hundred surnames derived from places which can be identified with reasonable certainty. It is not surprising that many are in Warwickshire, but rather more than half are in other counties.

Figure 2 shows the places from which Coventrians in 1349 took their names. It is clear that those immigrants who did not come from neighbouring counties, came to Coventry from the east rather than the west, from London and the Thames valley and the areas

between Coventry and the Wash, rather than from the Severn valley, Wales, or the West Country.

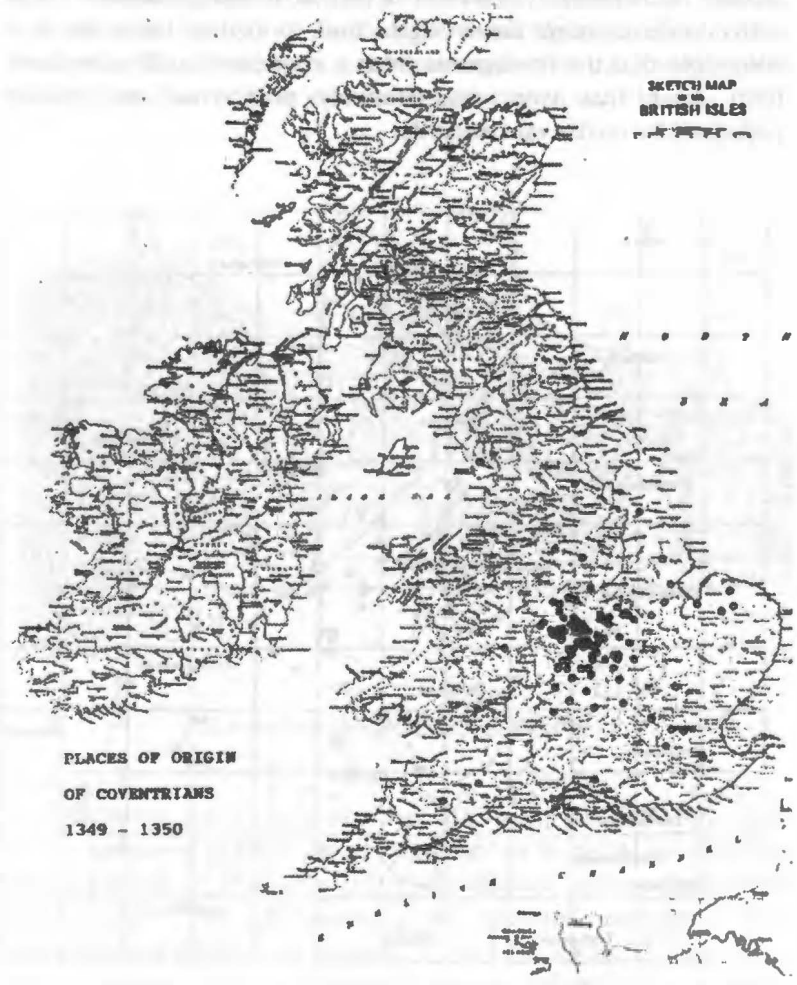


Figure 2 Places of Origin of Coventrians, 1349 - 1350

Figure 3 shows the places of origin of those from the midland counties. Again, they come from the east and north rather than from the southwest. The absence of immigrants from Worcestershire, for instance, is very marked, and there is the solitary Nicholas de Cirencester to represent Gloucestershire. It is easier to demonstrate these origins than to explain them, but it is noticeable that the immigrants from a considerable distance came from areas that were comparatively prosperous and thickly populated by mediæval standards.

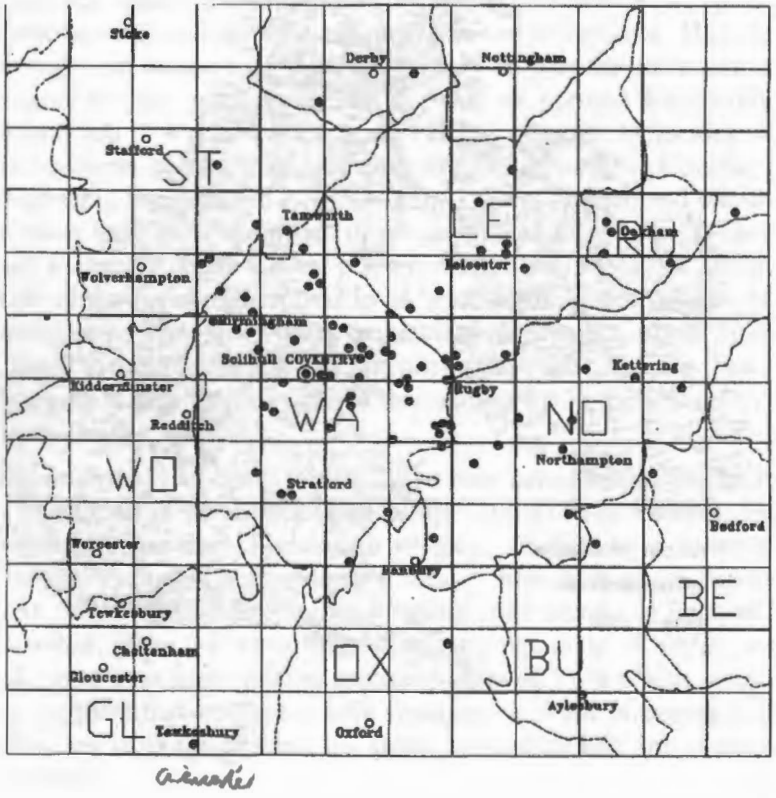


Figure 3 Origins of Coventrians from Midland Counties

It is well known that villeins, who were supposed to be bound to stay on the manor where they were born, might flee to towns and be free of their villein status by staying there a year and a day. But the townsmen did not necessarily accept them as full citizens, and some, no doubt, found it better to have a document, a deed of manumission by which their lord explicitly gave them their freedom. There are three such manumissions in the Coventry archives, and two refer to men living in the town in 1349. [2324]

Illustration IV Well Street Houses

One, Nicholas Alleyn, first heard of in Coventry in 1331, by 1348 had a tenement in Well Street described as a hall, two shops in Ironmonger Row, land near Hill Mill Meadow, and a messuage in Cook Street. His occupation is not revealed, but for a man presumably starting from scratch in 1331 he seems to have done well. Perhaps villeins with enough energy and enterprise to break out and earn their manumission were equipped above average to make a new life for themselves. (See endnote 23)

The other, Nicholas le Deyster, who was freed by Sir Ralph Barcebridge of Kingsbury in 1344, was a very substantial citizen, with two houses in Smithford Street and another tenement in Well Street, by 1349. Moreover he and his wife were members of one of the important gilds. If we assume that he only came to Coventry in 1344 we should judge him a thruster to have got so far in five years. But his manumission is dated in Coventry, witnessed by the bailiff and other notables, and describes him as 'of Coventry'. Probably he had been in the city some time, and it could be that he needed his document before he could be admitted to the gild. It is worth noting that neither he nor Alleyn bore surnames which mark them as immigrants, and it is probable that the figures for immigration which have been quoted are on the low side. (See endnote 24)

Prior's Part and Earl's Part

Figure 4a Comparison of Immigration in 1280

	Earl's Part	Prior's Part
Surnames indicating immigration	35% (of 252)	27% (of 184)

The immigrants and the prosperity which attracted and to which they in their turn contributed, were not equally distributed between the Earl's and the Prior's parts of the town. In 1280, two hundred and fifty-two tenants are identified in the Earl's part and a hundred and eighty-four in the Prior's. Of the larger population of the Earl's part, 35% appear to have been immigrants or their descendants against 27% of the Prior's men. As one would expect, the Earl's part was wealthier. In 1332 a Lay Subsidy was collected,[25] a tax of 1/10th of the value of a man's moveable goods (so far as townsmen were concerned). The contribution from the Earl's part was £40 9s 6d and from the Prior's men £6 6s 10½d. Not only did more people pay but there were more wealthy people in the Earl's part. Only one Prior's man paid 13s 4d; seven of the Earl's men paid twice as much, and one, Lawrence de Shepey, five times as much. The

complete figures are revealing. The number who pay at the lowest rate is almost the same in both parts, 31 and 30 (no doubt there

Figure 4b Comparison of Tax-payers in 1332

	Earl's Part	Prior's Part
£1 or over	15%	
13s 4d - £1	18%	2%
5s - 9s	15%	7%
3s - 4s	18%	21%
1s - 2s 8d	34% (31 taxpayers)	69% (30 taxpayers)
Total Tax Paid	£40 9s 6d	£6 6s 10½d

were many more too poor to be taxed at all). But these poorer tax-payers comprised over two thirds of the ones assessed in the Prior's part. Above them is a meagre pyramid capped by the one man who paid 13s 4d. In the Earl's part the economic strata rise in even progression, a solid block of prosperity (Figure 4b)

Perhaps it was inevitable that the Priors of the great monastery would attempt to secure authority over their up-and-coming neighbours. The contests have been described at some length by Mary Dormer Harris. In the 13th and early 14th centuries most of the rounds went to the Priors. They acquired the manorial rights over the Earl's part, and got from Henry III the right to appoint the town's coroners. The ancient market was in their half, and they secured a verdict, with £60 damages, forbidding trading in shops and houses in Earl Street, during market hours. (The market tolls, of course, were a valuable source of income to the Priory). The turbulence and violence of the men of the Earl's half seem to have defeated the Prior's attempt to organise a merchant gild to control the trade of the town, but it was the only victory they won.

The case about necromancy was symptomatic of the tensions in the town. In 1323 a group of substantial citizens were charged with employing a necromancer to bring about the death of the Prior, of

Edward II, who favoured him, and of others. With seven pounds of wax and two yards of canvas they fashioned images of their desired victims, and had a trial run with a leaden bodkin, thrust into the forehead of Richard Stowe, probably one of the Priory underlings. It seemed that Stowe became instantly mad, and encouraged by this result, they thrust the bodkin through the heart of the wax image, whereupon Stowe died. Several members of the conspiracy died and rest went to trial but were acquitted.[26]

This was a bad time for townsmen struggling against monastic lords. In St Albans, Dunstable, and later Bury St Edmunds, they were defeated. In Coventry they were saved by a piece of good luck. After the death of the last Earl of Chester, his successors were the de Montalts. In 1249 Roger de Montalt sold the lordship of the Earl's half to the Prior, William de Brightwalton, so that the prior was then lord of the whole town, But there was a rent-charge attached to the transaction, an annual fixed rent (the 'fee-farm rent' which persisted into modern times) payable to the Montalts. The Montalts entailed this to Queen Isabella, widow of Edward II, and it passed to her in 1327.

In alliance with this strong-minded lady, the men of the Earl's half fought the Prior, by legal and illegal means, and acquired new privileges from her son, Edward III. In 1334, their merchandise was freed from toll throughout England, and in 1340 they were allowed to form their own gild-merchant, the gild of St Mary. Three years later twelve men 'bought the freedom', that is, obtained their charter of incorporation recognising them as a legal personality, and the first mayor, John Ward, took office in January 1346. The town was still divided, the Prior still appointed the coroner and took the market tolls, but he was on the defensive, and the men of the Earl's part were riding high.

Physical Growth of the Town

The struggle with the Prior and its outcome have been briefly discussed to make it clear that when the plague came in 1349, it attacked a vigorous and prosperous community, looking forward to even further developments under its new form of civic government. Some expansion of the town itself was one possibility, and there is a hint that already fairly-sophisticated Commercial practices had evolved (see Wm Mauncell's Bond, Appendix 2).

Figure 5 is not an exact representation of Coventry in 1349, but is intended to give a general impression of the 14th century town. The walls, for instance, were not yet started, but the town was

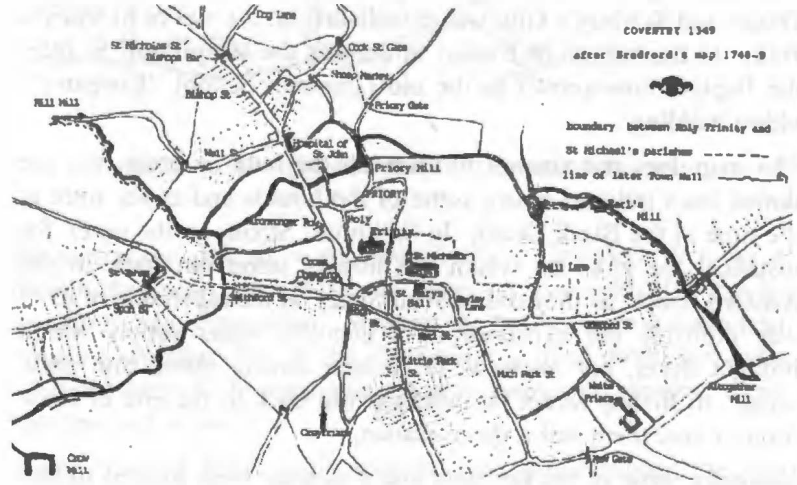


Figure 5 Impression of 14th century Coventry

encircled by a ditch, which in some places, at least, followed the same line. Where the roads crossed the ditch, they were closed by barriers, Bishop's Bar, Spon Street Bar, or 'the New Gate in Gosford' for instance. It is assumed that the ancient boundary between St Michael's and Holy Trinity parishes is in fact the

original division between the Prior's and the Earl's halves.[27] The market grew up in Cross Cheaping near the gates of the Priory, and the different groups of trades clustered together. Deeds refer to 'the butchers' stalls', and to 'the place in the market where the corn is sold' for instance.

Mill Lane, now Cox Street, led to the Earl's mills on the Sherbourne, then in Priory hands. There were mills on Radford Brook, one called Hill Mill, also the Prior's, perhaps on the site of the present Naul's Mill Pool

Besides the great Priory church of St Mary, each part of Coventry had its own parish church, Holy Trinity for the Prior's part and St Michael's (the old cathedral as we now call it) for the Earl's part. Monasteries of Greyfriars and Whitefriars were established on the sites we associate with them. Down in Bablake the chapel of St John the Baptist's Gild was being built at the time of the Black Death, and St Mary's Gild was established on the site of St Mary's Hall. At the bottom of Bishop Street was the Hospital of St John the Baptist, now known as the old Grammar School, 'Coventry's oldest building'.

The map does not attempt to show all the built-up areas, but the dotted lines indicate where some of the houses and crofts were at the time of the Black Death. In Smithford Street, on the north, for instance, the plots on which the houses stood ran back to the Radford Brook, as they did in Well Street on the other side of it. It was probably the existence of a plentiful water supply which brought dyers, our Nicholas le Deyster among them, into these areas. In Bishop Street the holdings ran back to the end of Cook Street where there was a sheep market.

Naturally some of the butchers and a skinner were located in this area. The town had already spread in several directions beyond its ditch and and outside the circuit of the future city wall. Apart from odd houses at Hill Cross and along Dog Lane, there were a fair number in St Nicholas Street where St Nicholas church still stood. A couple of tailors seem to have settled in this area. The houses had spread along Spon Street at least as far as Crow Lane which ran to Crow Mill. On the south side the plots ran down to the river, on

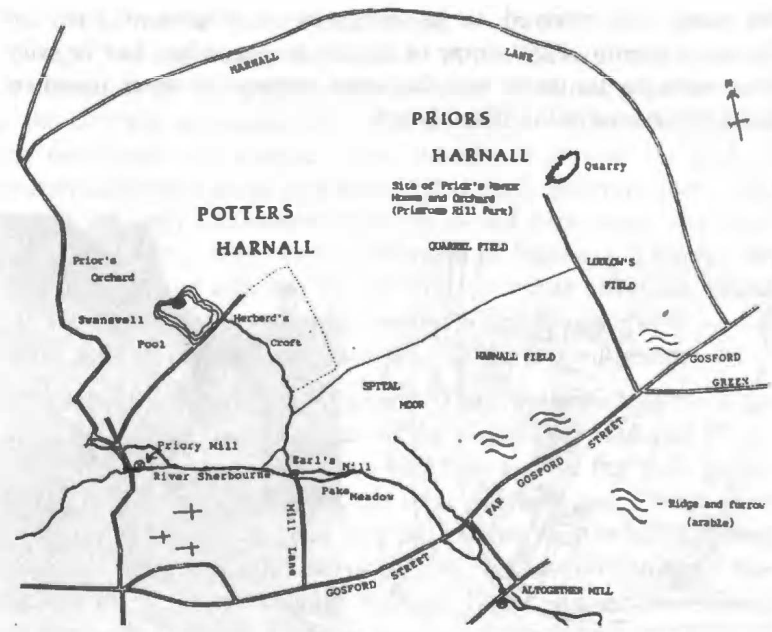
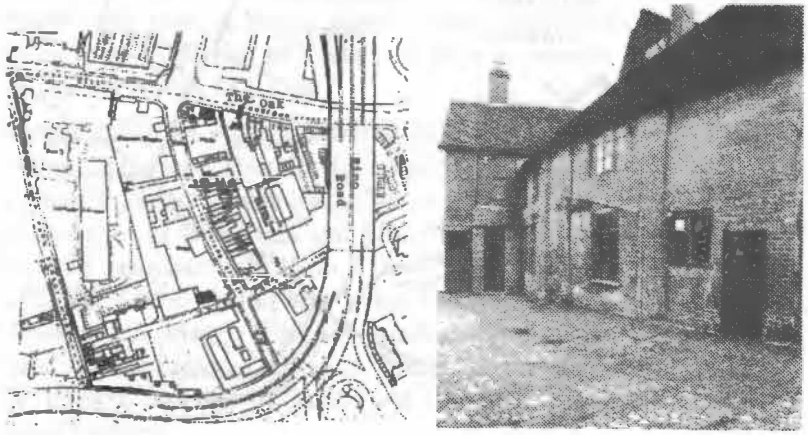


Figure 6 Cornfields close to the heart of the city

the north they abutted on the open fields of Coundon. It looks as though this was not one of the areas most sought after by the wealthier men of the town. Some of the houses seem to have been crowded together, few of the chief citizens lived there, and, what was certainly a disadvantage, it was home to tanners, dyers, saddlers and skinners.

Along Gosford Street also, the town had spread beyond the gate. There were houses on both sides of the road between the two bridges and for some way beyond them. On the north side the holdings ran back until they met the demesne land of the Prior's manor of Harnall. Although there was often open land in the back areas, the houses appear to have been closely crowded along the streets. In Nuneaton in 1227 the Prioress granted the right to hold plots in burgage on the same terms as the Prior's men in Coventry. As late as 1554 these burgages in Nuneaton were still to be distinguished as the sites of a single house or perhaps two houses,

and were still referred to as burgages in documents, but in Coventry, even by 1280, some of the old burgages had four or even seven cottages on them, and the word burgage is never found in deeds of the time of the Black Death.



The OAK Public House. The site, back garden and building line follow the medieval plough-curve.

Illustration V Gosford Street - South side

A "New Town" – Cheylesmore Park

One area not mentioned so far in this tour round Coventry is Earl Street and the land to the south of it. The Earl's Street had been the heart of the Earl's half. On the north side the tenements butted on the backs of those in Bayley Lane, including St Mary's Hall. On the south some houses had crofts running back, the most western ones facing the rear boundary of properties in Little Park Street. This street and Much Park Street led to Cheylesmore Park in which stood the manor house belonging to Queen Isabelle.

The park was a property developer's dream; land pleasantly elevated, but not steeply sloped, close to the centre of things, yet all in the hands of one owner unencumbered by buildings or tenants. If the city was to expand, here was the place to start. Isabella did not turn down the chance. She leased out part of her park in quarter-acre plots to no less than eighty-eight different men. She herself was only a life-tenant, and we do not know when she made these grants, but they were confirmed in February 1348 by the Black Prince, and after him by the king, so that in effect the lessees got the freeholds for an annual rent of fivepence per plot (we also do not know what they may have paid for the original grants).

Who were these eighty-eight men ? They were the leaders of the municipality and the merchants of the city. They included all the twelve who bought the freedom in 1345, and all but three of the men who became mayors in the next twenty years. Most were described as merchants. Not only the mayors were in but also their relatives. William Luffe, mayor in 1347, was accompanied by five other Luffes, all merchants; Richard Stoke, mayor four times, appears with Peter de Stoke, a founder of the Gild of St John the Baptist and two other Stokes, all merchants; four Huntes were there as well as Roger, one of The Twelve, Nicholas Michel, mayor in the year of the Black Death, and Richard Frebern and Richard de Keresleye, bailiffs at the same time.

Let us look for a moment at an early 20th century plan of the Little and Much Park Streets area. Earl Street is not shown, but there are the southern ends of the properties in Earl Street, including Old Palace Yard. Once clear of these, the traces of the regular lay-out of Queen Isabella's plots are still discernible in spite of the 19th century developments - the notorious courts and small industrial plants. One archaeologist has called this 'Coventry's first piece of town planning'; the frontage of these plots is approximately 22 yards and the distance from Little Park Street to Much Park Street is 220 yards, so a strip 22 yards wide right across would be an acre.

Figure 7 Little and Much Park Streets: Layout of Queen Isabella's plots

In fact the quarter acres must have sometimes been joined together. Most of the plots are in fact ½ acres in Little Park Street, but several ¼ acres can be discerned in Much Park Street. This was obviously becoming the best residential area, and existing cottages on the fringe of it were being thrown together to make messuages or substantial houses. [Massive stone walls dividing some of the plots, were uncovered by members of the Coventry & District Archaeological Society in excavations carried out before the building of the modern Law Courts. These remains were eloquent of the wealth of the mediæval citizens in this area]

The coming of the Black Death – the evidence

At the time that the Black Prince and Edward III confirmed these grants the pandemic known as the Black Death, generally believed to have been bubonic plague or the pneumonic form had gained a foothold in southern France, and it reached England by the end of the year (1348).

The precise nature of the pandemic has latterly been a matter of intense interest and speculation amongst medical historians.[28] It has been argued that this was not bubonic plague, as believed by generations of historians, but, for example, possibly typhus, or anthrax. The disease called 'plague' itself appears in three different forms, namely bubonic, pneumonic, and septicaemic. The plague bacillus (pestis pasteurella or pestis Yersinia) lives in the gut of fleas which in turn live upon rodents, so that a precondition for an epidemic is the presence of rodents in close proximity to man. In 1349 these were black rats (rattus rattus), which live in buildings, houses, sheds, where human beings are immediately open to infection. Certain conditions conducive to the increase of the plague bacilli cause them to flood the rat-fleas' gut, which becomes so engorged as to be 'blocked' and prevent the flea from ingesting; its bite is then so infected as to kill the rat-host, and, ravenously hungry, the flea migrates in search of another host, which may be man: conditions are then ripe for an epidemic. The location of the bite may swell and blacken to form a bubo, whence the name 'bubonic' plague. This, the most common form of the disease, is

not in fact the most deadly, and there is a 15% to 40% chance of survival. The two other forms, pneumonic, which attacks the lungs, and septicaemic, which floods the bloodstream, are almost totally lethal.

The evidence for the epidemic in Coventry is completely circumstantial. We have no clinical data whatsoever, and must be content to diagnose the disease loosely as the 'Black Death', probably the bubonic form, following the consensus of opinion.

There is virtue, however, in the formal nature of our evidence. Legal property transactions offer no scope for hysterical or superstitious outbursts such as are apt to colour accounts of plague visitations, as

> *'50 persons died of plague and 50 ravens flew round the church steeple it was a wonder to see it'*

where the neat round number alone gives rise to scepticism; or the comment by Geoffrey le Baker, a contemporary chronicler, that 'the whole of England' [during the Black Death] 'was so violently affected that hardly one tenth survived of either sex, tho' few nobles died.'[29]

Our evidence , as has been said, is based upon legal property transactions. Amongst Coventry Corporation archives are 175 deeds bearing the date of the 23rd year of the reign of Edward III, and relating to properties. in the city. This was the year 1349, and the number of deeds is greater than for any other year of the mid-14th century; as only 42 survive for 1348 and 31 for 1350 it is inescapable that this surge of movement in the property market reflected the turmoil caused by a visitation of the dread disease.[30]

Moreover these deeds differ from those typical of normal years, when Coventrians might be found using formal documents to ratify agreements about trivial matters, such as who should repair gutters taking water from adjoining houses.[31] There is no time in 1349 for such trifling matters. A second difference is the appearance of powers of attorney (absent in 1348 and 1351) authorising someone to act on behalf of an owner in handing over property to a new owner (it was legally essential for the owner to meet the buyer or donee on site and formally put him in possession; this is what

normally happened, though at need it could be done by proxy. In normal times, in a small town, it was no great inconvenience to

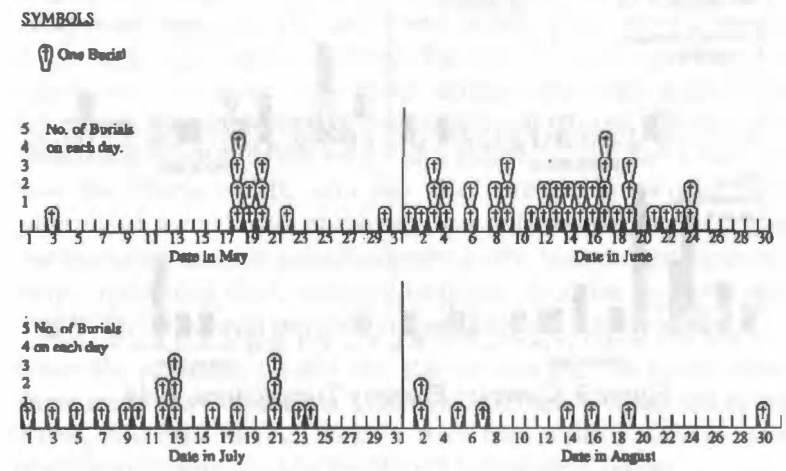


Figure 8 Clifton-on-Dunsmore Burials 1604.

hand over the property oneself). Among the deeds for 1349 there are 19 powers of attorney, and we know that some of the people who appointed representatives in this way died shortly afterwards (and indeed after making other types of property transactions - see Appendix 1)

A third difference is that in normal years most conveyances are made to single individuals or to two people, but in 1349 the majority are to groups of men who turn out to be trustees of the great Coventry gilds.

Finally there is a difference in timing. In a normal year there does not seem to be any particular season for drawing up deeds, except that there was perhaps a little more business in the five or six weeks before a Quarter Day. In 1349 the business builds up from a mere 13 deeds in February to a peak of 55 in May.

If we consider not just deeds in general but also the initial documents starting a transaction which may take several deeds to complete, we can discern a pattern. Its significance will be clear if we look first at another pattern. This shows the deaths from an

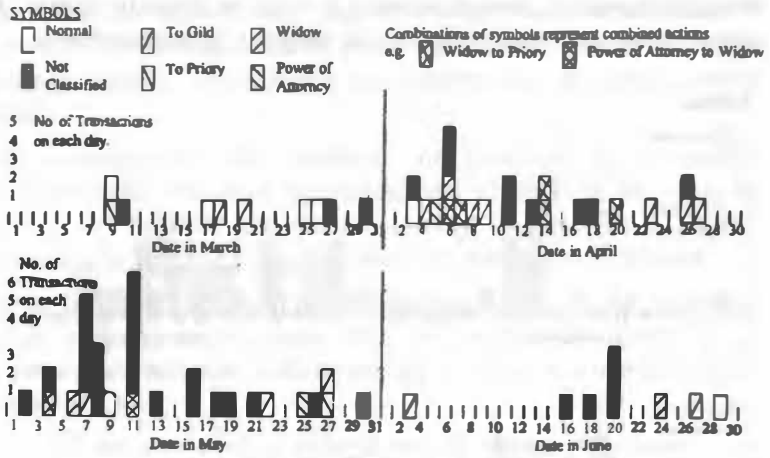


Figure 9 Coventry Property Transactions, 1349

epidemic, believed to be the plague, at Clifton-on-Dunsmore near Rugby in 1604. A single burial on May 3rd, which may have been due to the plague, is followed a fortnight later by a small outbreak - eight deaths in a small village. There is then a week's respite, then the main wave of the epidemic, an interval of six days, then another wave, and then the epidemic subsided with a few deaths at intervals.[32]

If we compare Figure 9, showing Coventry Property Transactions, with Figure 8, the similarity will be clear, though the pattern is not so sharply defined. One cannot expect it to be as it is not a chart of burials but of legal transactions, which may be connected with deaths. We have evidence that some of these conveyers of properties died within the year, in some cases shortly after the date of the deed. The symbols of Figure 9 show the type of transactions. Some transactions were initiated by a widow, in others an attorney was nominated to hand over the property. Other symbols show that the property was conveyed to trustees for one of the gilds or to the Priory. There are also 'normal' transactions, which could have occurred at any time, irrespective of the plague. One transaction refers to an orphan making over her property to her mother.

We think that this chart demonstrates that the plague probably appeared in Coventry in March 1349, and that April and May saw its greatest severity. Whatever else happened in the city, clearly the clerks were busy, and the mayor and bailiffs also. Most Coventry deeds have the mayor and two bailiffs, as well as others, as witnesses. The deeds were drawn up and then acknowledged by the parties or perhaps their representatives, before the officials. Sometimes, instead of the mayor and bailiffs of the Earl's part, we have the Prior's bailiff, who was also coroner, as witness. The presence of a small seal of the city, the only known impression of that particular seal, on a deed whereby a girl, Joan de Arthingworth, whose father had died, conveys her property to her mother Lucy, suggests some special supervision over transactions by orphans.[33]

When the epidemic hit the city this system did not break down. There are in the Corporation's archives, 135 deeds witnessed by the mayor, Nicholas Michel, usually with two bailiffs, during 1349, besides some witnessed by the Prior's bailiff and Coroner.

Illustration VI Some Coventry Seals

Mortality

There are a number of factors to help us assess the severity of the visitation of the plague. We know for certain of some who died, and there are many more who are not heard of again after the summer of 1349. The Prior, William Irreys, died on 29th July, and while Nicholas Michel, the mayor and one bailiff, Richard Frebern, carried on throughout their year of office, the second bailiff, Richard de Keresley, disappeared and was replaced by William de Happesford, who in turn leaves the scene and is referred to as 'formerly the owner' of a tenement in October. A new coroner appears in May, and the jury who inquired into the value of the dead Prior's estates on August 8th, declared that Hill Mill, another mill in Radford, and a windmill are all out of action for want of millers, and that the greater part of the Prior's freehold and customary tenants in Exhall, Keresley, Willenhall and Coundon, who used to pay £20 in rents of assize before 'the pestilence' are now dead. This would mean that the greater part of about 100 heads of families had died, and presumably had not been replaced as tenants by their sons or wives.[34]

But it is always difficult to get firm figures for mortality during the Black Death. We have made an attempt to get a random sample of the population of Coventry by taking the people who appear in the deeds by accident, as it were, because the house or land adjoining theirs changed hands in 1349. It was customary to locate property in deeds by quoting the boundary holders, as for instance, 'it lies in Gosford Street between the holdings of John Box and Robert de Skarnyng sideways, and between the highway and the holding of Simon Child lengthways'.

But often instead of an existing boundary holder we get a former owner, indicated by the Latin word 'quondam' (formerly). Unfortunately it is impossible to tell from this whether it belonged, say, to the [quondam] Henry Spicer, or that Henry . still alive, has sold the property to someone else. The laziness of conveyancing clerks is also a factor; instead of finding out who the present boundary owners are, they may well copy the names from an old deed, adding 'quondam' to the names for safety, though the people named may still in fact be in possession. We have no proof that the

Coventry clerks in 1349 did this, but it was certainly, a habit of later conveyancers, and we must allow for it.

Year	Quondam	Existing
1348	♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ 12	♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ 45
1349	♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ ♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦ ♦♦♦♦♦♦ 81	♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ ♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣♣ 96

Figure 10 Boundary Holders in 1348 and 1349 (Quondams)

With this in mind, and to allow for the normal death rate, we have looked first at the year before the epidemic, 1348, to see what proportion of the boundary owners are described as quondam, and repeated the process for 1349. There were, as we have seen, many more deeds in 1349, but what is important is the proportion of quondam owners compared with those named as actually in possession. In 1348, 21% of boundary owners are quondam; in 1349, it is 46%. If we think that the 21% covers deaths in a normal year and also the imperfections in the scribes' methods which have just been mentioned, and we subtract this figure from 46%, we get 25% of quondams attributable to the Black Death. In other words, it was not known who owned 25% of the properties mentioned as boundaries.

These figures will be on the low side as an indication of the death rate. Some citizens shown as alive and in possession in April, for instance, must have died later in the year. So it seems safe to say that among the owners of property, at any rate, the death rate was 25% and probably more. As so often happens, the poorer propertiless members of the population cannot be investigated, but they are not likely to have fared better.[35]

We have tried to get some idea of the distribution of the plague amongst the city's streets by plotting these quondams and existing

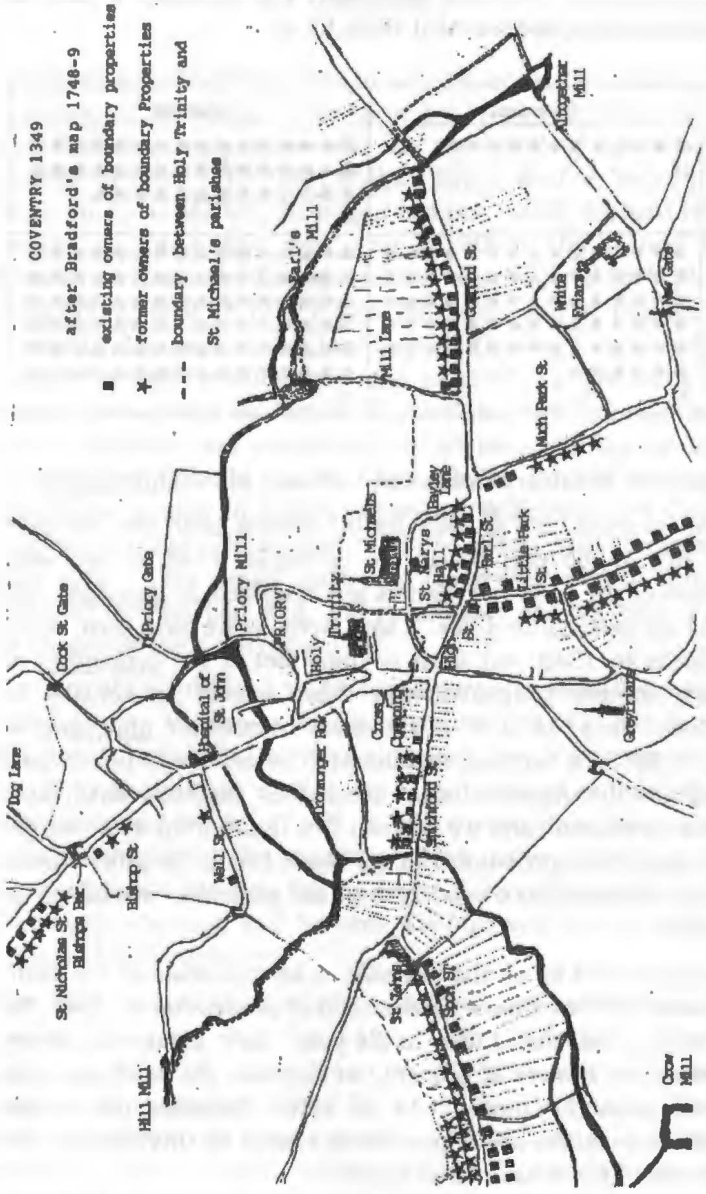


Figure 11 Coventry, 1349 (Quondams: Existing boundary owners, by streets)

owners on the map. Figure 10 shows a comparison of 1348 and 1349, the stars representing quondams, the diamonds existing owners. It is plain that the proportion of quondams is much greater in 1349. Turning to the streets, it is most important to remember that many areas are blank simply from lack of evidence, and that such symbols as are plotted may be regarded as accidental information. Nor have the precise locations of the symbols any significance, except that our information refers to a particular street.

Again, the proportions are the significant thing, and if we compare, say, Little Park Street, with half the number of quondams to existing owners, and Gosford Street with a proportion of 13 to 17, or Earl Street with 7 to 6, it seems clear that our earlier picture of the Little Park Street area as a desirable residential one holds good, and that the older built-up districts of Gosford Street and Earl Street were less healthy. If we consider the more westerly side of the city, an even greater contrast appears. Spon Street has 18 quondams to 14 existing owners, that is, 56% compared with the 21% for the town as a whole which we obtained for the normal year of 1348. If we subtract this 21% again as normal 'depreciation', as it were, we get 35%, which is 10% higher mortality than we obtained for the city in general. It is plain therefore that Spon Street was especially hard hit.[36] Since the trades represented here included dyeing and tanning, the 'climate' was probably ideal for the spread of disease.

Other areas such as St Nicholas Street, and, surprisingly, Much Park Street, look suspiciously unhealthy, but the information is too scanty to warrant any strong conclusions. For the streets shown as blank, the evidence is either missing or too meagre to be of significance.

Property: The Gilds and the Priory

We now come to the activities of the citizens during the epidemic. It is clear that the officials stuck to their posts (in London, the King's Bench had no session for the Trinity term that year because of the plague).[37] What were the others doing ? Over many spheres of life the question will probably never be answered, but we can at

any rate see what they were doing with their property, which was one aspect of trying to adjust to a disastrous situation.

Many of the deeds from the Black Death year in the City Record Office are concerned with the conveyance of property to the gilds which had been founded in Coventry in the nine years before the onset of the plague. St Mary's, founded in 1340 as a merchant gild, is thought to have been the rallying point for the men of the Earl's half in their struggle with the Prior. The Gild took as its device the the Coronation of the Virgin, which appears on its seals, and on the central boss in the roof of the entrance porch of St Mary's Hall (see rear cover illustration). It held its services in the Lady Chapel of St Michael's. For centuries it was closely linked with the Corporation. St Mary's Hall was the seat of civic government. Lord Mayors are still made there.

St John the Baptist's Gild was founded in 1342, its function being apparently religious, to provide six chaplains to celebrate masses for its members. Within two years it had started to build its own gild chapel, now St John's Church. In the following year the Gild of St Katharine was founded, linked with the chapel of that name

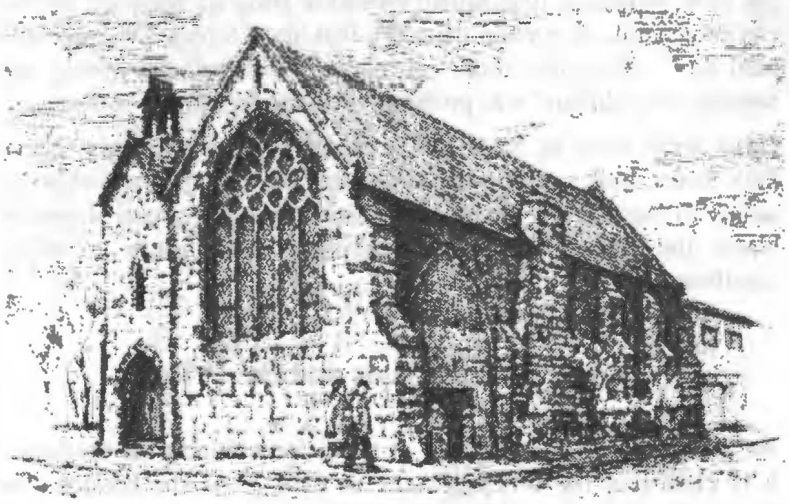


Illustration VII The Old Grammar School.

which was part of St John the Baptist's Hospital or Almshouse - now called 'the Old Grammar School' - nothing to do with St John the Baptist's Gild. In 1364 a new gild, the Trinity Gild, was founded and the other three united with it, taking the name of the Trinity Gild as the normal short title for the whole organisation, rather surprisingly, in spite of the fact that St Mary's Hall was its headquarters; the close link with the Corporation continued. The union of the gilds after the Black Death has been mentioned because the Register of the Trinity Guild is an important source for the history of the period.[38] As one of the functions of the Gild was to ensure that masses were said for members after their death, they kept registers not only of present members but of all their past ones, so that the Register contains the names of the original members of the three gilds founded before the Black Death, though it is impossible to tell which gild.[39] So when we say that a man or woman was a Gild member, we mean that we know they were members of St Mary's, St John the Baptist's, or St Katharine's, but we don't know which. Another Gild was founded in the year before the Black Death, namely Corpus Christi intended apparently for the Prior's tenants, and associated with the Lady Chapel of Holy Trinity. This maintained a separate existence until the Gilds were suppressed at the Reformation, but its great register exists only in manuscript.

There were many aspects of gild life; as we have seen, St Mary's, and later St John the Baptist's seem to have been closely linked with the Corporation, and no doubt the important citizens discussed other than religious matters at their meetings, but to be a Gild member meant also going to church with one's gild members, even in a specially built chapel, and perhaps being taken to one's grave under a special embroidered Gild pall. The Gilds also acted as benefit societies caring for the dependants of deceased members, and Gildsmen and women expected to turn to them in times of misfortune.

In the deeds we have studied at the time of the Black Death there are many transfers of properties to groups of people who turn out on investigation to be trustees for the Gilds of St Mary, St John the Baptist and, we think, St Katharine. During the year, according to the deeds which are still extant, the freehold of a large amount of

property was handed over to representatives of the gilds. About 64 transactions were involved,, and the property comprised 36½ messuages or houses, 16 tenements, 25 cottages, one shop, a bakehouse, rents valued at 35s 5d a year, and some unspecified acreages of land. Some individual transactions will illustrate what was going on. John de Arthingworth was a merchant of some substance, Coventry's first town coroner (BA/B/P/431/5), one of those who was granted a rood of land by Queen Isabella, and owner of property in Gosford Street, Stoke, Binley and elsewhere. On 8th March 1349 he conveyed most of his property to two important citizens, John de Ruishall, one of the Twelve who purchased the freedom, and Henry Payne, merchant and town bailiff. Shortly afterwards, certainly by April 14th, John died, and Ruishall and Payne, whom we can regard as his trustees, proceeded to distribute his property, no doubt in accordance with his wishes. Within five days they transferred the rent from three cottages in Gosford Street to Sewall de Bulkington, Master of St Mary's Gild, and four other Gild members. A week later, they conveyed the rent of three cottages to the chaplains of St John the Baptist Gild and another Gild member. Apparently these cottages were already in the occupation of the Gild, and this transaction cancelled the rent which they had been previously paying to Arthingworth. Payne and Ruishall transferred a messuage in Gosford Street to a man and his wife in May, and in June, other rents from properties in Coventry, Stoke, Binley, and Whitley, to St Mary's Gild trustees. Some property had remained with Arthingworth's widow Lucy and daughter Joan. On 14th April Joan transferred her property to her mother and then disappears from the records. In May her mother handed over this property to St Mary's Gild.[40]

On February 10th, William de Wales de Rothwell of Coventry (as he is styled in the deed) started a family settlement.[41] He conveyed his tenement in Little Park Street and his three cottages in Cow Lane, to John de Wales de Rothwell, who three days later entailed them on William's wife Isabel for her life, to go to William's heirs after her death. A deed is missing, but by 18th March Isabel was a widow, and the freehold had been transferred to St Mary's Gild, leaving Isabel with a lease for it for her life, at an annual rent of five shillings.

Robert de Skarning and his wife Joan had a house by Gosford Bridge, a bakehouse with a furnace and oven, and another tenement, perhaps a shop, with a cellar, in Gosford Street, which included a small chamber in which they usually slept. On 7th May, they handed over the tenement with cellar, except for the chamber in which they slept, but including all the goods and chattels therein, to representatives of St John the Baptist's Gild. Four days later the other house and the bakehouse were similarly made over to trustees of St Mary's Gild. Robert died shortly afterwards, certainly by 21st May, and the Gild trustees in both cases entailed the properties to go to Joan the widow for her life, and after her, to her daughter by Robert, and the heirs of her body, and on any failure of her direct line, to revert to the Gilds. This meant that the widow and her daughter, and her daughter's husband and their children and direct decendants, would in fact continue to enjoy the property, but the rights of cousins or more distant relatives had been abolished, nor would the children of any second marriage by the widow have any interest in the property. Inevitably the direct line would fail sometime, and everything would then go to the Gilds.[42]

John Bower was another of those who had a rood of land from Queen Isabella. He was one of the minority who was not described as a merchant, in that grant being named a vintner.[43] He died sometime between April 8th and 21st May 1349. He and his wife Agnes do not seem to have been quite in the swim, for they were not Gild members, but Agnes was obviously some relative of William Horne, an ex-mayor and an important man, and she had some expectations from, or an interest in, a messuage which he held in Much Park Street. On 21st May she relinquished her claims in this to Horne, who then transferred this messuage to St Mary's Gild. At the same time Agnes conveyed the house where she lived in Little Park Street, except for a space, six feet by six feet for her bed, to the Gild of St John the Baptist, along with all the goods in her house, and she appointed Horne her attorney to hand over the property. Four days later St Mary's Gild entailed the Much Park Street house on Horne for life, with succession to Agnes and the heirs of her body, and St John the Baptist's Gild entailed the Little Park Street house directly to Agnes and the heirs of her body; in

both cases the property was to revert to the Gilds when the direct line failed.[44]

Can we deduce what lies behind these transactions? They do not, we think, indicate people fleeing from Coventry in panic and getting rid of their property as best they can. In several cases the people who made the conveyances seem to have died soon afterwards, leaving their dependants still occupying the property. Were the Gilds merely exploiting the citizens difficulties or had they a more philanthropic aim ? Perhaps we should look at the whole of the transactions of a gild so far as we know them. In the case of St Mary's, 25 different conveyances were made to them; 20 were made by Gild members, that is, people to be found in the Trinity Gild Register. So the Gild was doing most of its business with its own members, whom it was supposed to protect. In each gild there were men who acted as trustees, receiving property for the gild early in summer, who died themselves later, when their estate went to the gild. No-one knew whether it would be his turn next. On the other hand, the five conveyances to St Mary's by non-members suggest that the Gild was not against buying property if it was going on advantageous terms.

In 15 of the 25 transactions, we do not know what happened to the house or land once the gild had received it. Four of the ten cases when we do know something concern widows. Each continued to hold the property, two had it entailed to them and their children with ultimate reversion to the gild. Two had leases for their lives only - we do not know whether they had any children, of course. One man who conveyed his property to the Gild, probably after the death of his father, had it leased back to him at a rent of one penny a year. If we might venture what is nothing more than a hypothesis, the transactions suggest that gild members or their dependents gave up something to the gild in return for help, cash or an annuity, in their difficulties. In some cases, where the property was entailed back, they did not give up much. Where they became life tenants the gild got a more valuable interest in their estate. Perhaps the settlement varied according to the amount of help given. One non-member had part of his property leased back to him. In three cases the gild leased the property a year or more after the plague to third parties on economic terms.

In the case of St John the Baptist's Gild, half the original owners were non-members. The owners included three couples, and in two cases the man certainly died soon after, and in the third, the man almost certainly did; there was also the daughter of a man who had died. In one case the property was leased to a relative of the owner, in the other two it was entailed on the widow.

A third group. of trustees were probably representatives of St Katherine's Gild, but we have only indirect evidence for this. We have not found any trace of the activities of Corpus Christi Gild, which, of course, had only been founded in the previous year.

It is well known that the Gilds of St Mary and St John the Baptist were closely linked with the Corporation. Furthermore, on the dissolution of the religious gilds in the 16th century, the Corporation acquired their estates, so that the acquisitions during the Black Death Year may be regarded as the beginnings of the great estates which the Corporation holds in Coventry today.

Not only the Gilds were acquiring houses and land; the Priory was also in the property market. The Prior and Convent were represented by three trustees or agents to whom the property was conveyed until the necessary licences to alienate in mortmain had been obtained. Then in June and July the properties were transferred to the Priory. In Coventry and Warwickshire the acquisitions included 35 messuages, 24 acres of arable land, 5 acres of pasture, and other parcels of woodland, crofts, and so on. A considerable amount of these were in Coventry, Coundon and Radford, but within the city and its suburbs they were not equal to the acquisitions of the gilds.[45]

The account which we have been able to extract from the Corporation's archives is not a flamboyant one. We can paint no pictures of half-naked flagellants scourging themselves in the streets, or of panic, religious frenzy or debauchery. We cannot say, of course, that these things did not happen in Coventry, but rather is there an impression of a community of traders and craftsmen as an acquisitive society, more typically looking to the disposition of property and the provision for dependants in a time of crisis or disaster.

The Effect on the Economy of Coventry.

What was the situation in Coventry when the main force of the epidemic was spent ? Not surprisingly, the city's economic life seems to have suffered in the short term. In June 1349, for instance, a property in Earl Street consisting of a messuage with cellar and tavern was leased for eight marks a year. The rent was to be reconsidered later, to be increased or reduced according to what was judged fair. In August the lessee had the property at a rent of seven marks, with an additional bakehouse and two shops.[46] But by the next year property owners were clearly not desperate for tenants. In August 1350, for instance, St Mary's Gild leased, for lives, a tenement with shops in Gosford Street. The rent was 96 shillings a year, on a full repairing lease - anything which fell down was to be re-erected within a year, and in default the lessees were to pay ten pounds sterling. Moreover they agreed that they were liable to a ten pound penalty if they wished to surrender their lease.[47] These conditions could hardly have been imposed if property was difficult to let.

A comparison may be made with the experiences of Oxford and Canterbury. Both these towns seem to have showed resilience and even buoyancy after the Black Death, judging by rents, though both knew high rates of mortality.[48] In the long term, as we know, the general history of Coventry's development hardly seems to have been interrupted by the Black Death. In 1355, the agreement known as the Tripartite Indenture put an end to the division of the city, the town walls were started and nearly a mile of them built in the next half-century; the churches were enlarged and in 1377, according to Dr Hoskins's calculations, the city was probably the third wealthiest in the country.[49]

Let us conclude by looking at one of the rare mediæval wills, that of John Prest, a merchant of Coventry, a founder of the Gild of Corpus Christi, and a member of both St Mary's and St John the Baptist's Gilds. From it we can picture an individual Coventrian much more clearly than we are able to do from most of the material on which this paper is based. In particular the prosperity enjoyed by a Coventry merchant twelve years after the Black Death will be obvious.

JOHN PREST'S WILL[50]

(Testament... of John Prest, of Coventre, merchant... Monday the morrow of St Peter's Chains, 1361) 2nd August 1361

He bequeaths his body to be buried in the chapel of St Mary of the Hospital of St John the Baptist, Coventre, if convenient, otherwise in Holy Trinity church nigh the tomb of Margery, his late wife; to the fabric of said church 26s 8d, to the high altar 40s; to every light 12d; to the fabric of the cathedral church of St Mary, Coventre, 40s

to the convent of the same, 40s; to the prior, 13s 4d; to the sub-prior 6s 8d

to the fabric of the cathedral church of Lichfield, 6s 8d; to the Hospital of St John the Baptist, Coventre, 6s 8d; to the nuns of Wroxhale, Catesby, Pynleye, Hynewode, and Rothewell, 20s apiece

to the abbot and convent of Combe (Cumba) 40s; to the abbot and convent of Stoneleye,.40s; to brother Robert Waydour, 40s;

to the fabric of the church of St Nicholas, Coventre, 6s 8d;

to Sir William Suwet, chaplain, 6s 8d;

to every sister of the said hospital (St John the Baptist), 2s;

to every patient (languenti) in the same, 6d

to every chaplain of the gild of St Mary and St John, 12d

to every chaplain coming to his (John Prest's) vigil, 6d;

to the Friars Minor of Coventre, 40s;

to the Friars Carmelite, 40s

to William de Catesby, 10 marks; to John, son of the same, 100s, to Joan, wife of same William, a silver cup (ciphum) with a cover, called a bowl (bollo);

to John Boyden his larger brass pot, and a dish with a laver (lavatorio), a cup (cifum) called a 'macer'. a piece of silver and twelve silver spoons;

to Thomas, John's brother, the same; to Simon Coupere, the same:

to Edward de Wedon and William Wolf, 2 marks apiece;

to the Austin Friars of Wyrcestre, six silver spoons;

to every poor person a one penny loaf;

to each candle-bearer, a cloak with hood of 'russet';

in wax to burn round his body, half a hundred of wax;

for funeral expenses, 100s;

to the gild of St Mary and St John, a cup (ciphum) called 'Note', his fairer one, which he bought in London;

to the same gild 21 marks, which Richard de Stoke owed him;

to his sister Isabel and her son, £20

[here follow 15 bequests, ranging from 3s 4d to 40s to various individuals, including servants]

to the pavement of Doggelane, to the gate called 'Davy yate', towards [Nun]Eton, 100s;

to mend the way below his orchard, 100s;

the residue to be disposed by his executors for his soul and the souls he was bound to pray for;

[further small bequests, including 6s 8d to Sir Henry, his chaplain, to Sir Henry, chaplain of St Mary, 12d. and to Thomas deacon of St Mary, 12d]

Endorsed: Proved XIX Kal. September, 1361 (14th August 1361)

Illustration VIII Great Butcher Row

APPENDIX 1 SOME COVENTRY PROPERTY OWNERS, DECEASED IN 1349

The following can be shown to have died that year from deeds in the City Record Office. (The deed references were of the form "23 Edward III", but the new type of Coventry Record Office numbering is employed below. Ed.)

Name and associates	Date	Deed
John de CANNELEY, of Coventry, butcher, witness,	5th April	BA/B/A/78/26
Quondam boundary owner (Bishop Street)	9th April 13th May	BA/B/P/44/13 BA/B/P/435/4
Joan his widow, a donor,		BA/B/P/435/3
Henry de CLIFTON, dyster, and Alice his wife, donors,	26th April	BA/H/H/157/3
Alice, his widow, quitclaims	30 April	BA/H/H/157/4
John HALYS (Hayles) a donor	7th April	BA/B/P/326/14
Agnes his widow, quitclaims	8th June	BA/B/P/326/16
Eadmund le SMYTH and Matilda his wife,	6 April	BA/H/H/355/1
attorn Wm Franceys and two others		
Matilda his widow, quitclaims	8 April	BA/H/H/355/3
Wm Franceys, one of his attorneys, dead by	16 May	q.v.
Thomas de COLLESHULL, donor	7 May	BA/B/P/242/2
Deceased by 19 May (Langley Cartulary no, 256)	19 May	
W, FRANCEYS, skinner, extant	6 April	BA/H/H/355/1
Emma his widow makes power of attorney	16 May	BA/B/P/112/4
Robert SKARNING extant	11 May	BA/B/P/163/5
Joan his widow,,quitclaims	21 May	BA/B/P/183/6
John ARTHINGWORTH, donor,	8th March	BA/B/P/182/5
Quondam	13th April	BA/D/BH/1/1
		BA/B/P/184/4

Name and associates	Date	Deed
Richard de KERESLEYE, town bailiff, extant	6 April	BA/B/P/292/17
Quondam	27 July	BA/B/P/292/18
Henry le SPICER, makes attorney,	? 19 May	BA/B/P/62/1
Mariota, his widow, quitclaims	29 June	BA/B/P/117/11
Thomas le CHALONER,, donor,	April 8	BA/B/P/17/10
Elizabeth, his widow, lessee for life,	19 May	BA/B/P/62/1

APPENDIX 2 A COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION

Wm Mauncell's Bond

Wm Mauncell of Bosegate binds himself, his heirs and 'my merchants' (meos mercatores) in £30 which has been received as a loan from Wm Mokes, mercer, of Coventry, to be repaid, with profits accruing, at Michaelmas 1349. Bond, 7 May 1349 (BA/B/P/162/2)

Editor's Note

The following supplementary Bibliography is for the most part a selection, only, of a massive number of works which have appeared on the Black Death and kindred topics in recent years. Britnell's article [4] might be suggested as a good start to any 'follow-up' reading. Carmichael's book [6] contains a very full 'Bibliographical Essay'.

Reference to these works, contained in the introductory section, is always indicated by a number in square brackets with the author's name only e.g. Horrox [21]

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ENDNOTES

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[19] Much has been written on the 'division' of the city since 1965. It is accepted that the Prior's Half originated in the 12th century, but whether before 1153 or later is still in dispute. See:

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[20] Wellstood, F.C., ed. *The Lay Subsidy for Warwickshire of Edw. III*...Dugdale Society, Vol. VI (1926)

[21] Henry de Grendon, BA/B/A/60/1, BA/H/H/371/1, BA/B/A/83/1

Robt de Arley, BA/D/D/37/1; Thos de Arley BA/D/D/37/2

[22] Hundred Roll Coventry 1280: Photostat copies of folios 100-114 of the composite Ms. volume in the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Record Office, Stratford upon Avon , were used, DR 18/31/3 [Now in print. See Introduction Endnote n. 10]

[23] Nicholas Alleyn BA/B/P/46/2 (28 Aug. 1331); BA/B/P/44/12; BA/H/H/299/1; PRO E 164/21, f. 118v; BA/B/P/80/7 (1351)

[24] Nicholas le Deyster, BA/H/H/234/3 (25 Jan 1344)

[25] See f.n. 18

[26] Harris, M.D., *Life in an Old English Town* (1898), 53-77

[27] Still accepted in general, but with some modifications in *Historic Towns*, Vol. II

[28] E.g. Shrewsbury, J.F.D., *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles* (1970); [30]

Hatcher, J., *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348-1530* (1977); [14]

Twigg, G., *The Black Death* (1984); [33]

[29] Stubbs, W., (ed.) *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, Vol. II

[30] 175 Coventry Corporation Deeds for the year 23 Edward III, Coventry Archives: see Coventry Archives Corporation Deeds Concordance.

[31] E.g. John le Beler, merchant has newly built his tenement up to that of the chaplain John le Northerne in Gosford Street. Through the intervention of friends they had agreed that the chaplain, whose gutter runs the length of his tenement, will forgo all lawsuits about the new building, and grants that le Beler may enjoy it without further dispute. BA/B/P/178/44 (7 Nov. 1345), It is interesting to note that gutter-agreements resumed in 1350 - see BA/B/P/292/20 (24 June 1350)

[32] Gooder, A., *Plague and Enclosure* (Coventry and North Warwickshire History Pamphlets, No 2, reprinted 1967)

[33] BA/D/BH/1/2 - Joan de Arthingworth's deed, with Corporation seal. More recent research suggests that the epidemic probably reached Coventry in autumn 1348; It is known to have begun in Bristol in August 1348, and may have come from there - in Coventry in the autumn 1348 the quondam rate is up 11% on normal (see pp.40 - 43.) The lull over the winter of 1348 until the more positive signs of the epidemic in March 1349 may possibly be accounted for by the known fact that the fleas which carry the bacterium hibernate in cold weather and may revive and transmit the disease as the weather warms up.

[34] Prior Irreys' I.P.M., PRO E153/240, ff. 139 - 140

[35] Later research gives us 26%. quondams above normal, a slightly higher figure for supposed deaths. The figures for Earl Street are probably too scanty to draw conclusions from them; many prominent merchants had their houses there - Botoners, de Shepeyes, Ballards, Langleys' and the substantial stone cellars still existing under some of the properties on the south side speak of a high standard of residences, unlikely to be as insalubrious as areas such as Spon Street, with its dyers, saddlers, tanners, whittawers.

[36] See Introduction p.16 Ed.

[37] G.0. Sayles (ed.) *Select Cases in the Court of the King's Bench - under Edward III*, Vol. VI (Selden Society, 82) 1965, pp. xlvii-xlix. Trinity term - 22 June - 8 July in 1349.

[38] Harris, M.D., ed., *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Trinity*.- Dugdale Society, Vol. XIII (1935)

[39] We now think that the first names in the lists for each Christian name were members of St Mary's Gild

[40] BA/B/P/182/5 (Top copy of two deeds attached together); BA/B/P/187/2 and 1; BA/B/P/189/1, BA/D/BH/1/2; BA/B/P/189/2

[41] BA/B/P/89/8, BA/B/P/359/13-15, BA/B/P/89/7, BA/B/P/267/15, BA/B/P/267/16, BA/B/P/267/20, BA/B/P/267/17, BA/B/P/267/21.

[42] BA/B/P/183/1, BA/B/P/183/3, BA/B/P/163/5, BA/B/P/183/7.

[43] But he is styled merchant in other deeds, e.g. BA/B/P/265/15 and 14.

[44] BA/B/P/267/18, BA/B/P/267/20, BA/B/P/267/17, BA/B/P/265/24 and 23, BA/B/P/294/12, BA/B/P/265/21, BA/B/P/265/22, BA/B/P/294/15 and 14.

[45] PRO E164/21, ff. 114v. 115, 115v, 116, 116v, 117

[46] BA/H/H/2/1, BA/B/P/266/24 associated with BA/B/P/266/26, BA/H/H/2/2, BA/B/P/267/11

[47] BA/B/P/188/2

[48] Butcher, A.F., 'Rent and the urban economy: Oxford and Canterbury in the Later Middle Ages', in *Southern History*, Vol.I (1979)

[49] Hoskins, W.G., *Local History in England*. (1959) p.176

[50] John Prest was a town bailiff for the year 1356-7 (BA/B/A/89/4, BA/H/H/393/5, BA/B/P/441/1), and a founder of Corpus Christi Gild (PRO *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1345-48*, pp. 97-98). A Chantry was founded by his executors from the residue of his will, to be held in the Priory Church. N.W. Alcock, 'The Catesbys in Coventry...', in Midland History, Vol. XV (1990) 17 ..His will, PRO *Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*, Vol., V A11564

DR. ARTHUR GOODER MM, PhD.

Arthur Gooder died in January 1992, and a tribute should be paid to this most modest and unassuming man.

After leaving school Arthur gained a B.A. in History at Leeds University which he followed with a historical paper which gained him a Doctorate (PhD). He worked as a teacher for 6 years before being enlisted in August 1941 in the 37th. Signal Training Regiment, Royal Artillery. He was posted to 154 in April 1942 and joined Q Battery as a gunner/signaller. As the Leicestershire Yeomanry magazine states, Q Battery 154 did not realise what a talented man they had in their midst.

In Italy, on July 13th 1944, in the battle for Monte Cedrone launched by 4/10 Baluch, Gunner Gooder, single handed and with only the protection of a jeep, operated two wireless sets for two hours while being continuously shelled and mortared and with the possibility of being over-run. By his exemplary courage and efficiency in relaying orders he enabled his Battery Commander, Major Tony Harvie, to bring accurate and effective fire where it was most needed in support of the infantry attack. Arthur was awarded the Military Medal.

In February 1945, Arthur was transferred to the Army Education Corps in the rank of Captain, with which rank he was demobilised in July 1946.

From 1946 to 1973 Arthur was a lecturer at Birmingham University Extra Mural Dept., retiring at the age of 64 to continue his research work with the Coventry branch of the Historical Association into the medieval history of Coventry. He was still working in his study on the morning of his death on Jan 17th 1992 aged 83. Two historical papers by Arthur are due to be published in 1998, but to keep his memory alive in historical circles, his widow Eileen, set up an Arthur Gooder Memorial Award of an annual prize of £250 for the best essay by a sixth form history student in Coventry. Mrs Gooder has presented Arthur's Military Medal and his other war service medals to the Yeomanry Museum.

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