



Extracts from the Chapter minutes from 1701 onwards and divers historical prospecting.

Mark Brandon: markandsuebrandon@outlook.com

GOOD NEWS

Emily writes: *Just to let you know that both the manuscripts you mention and we talked about are still safely in the Cathedral library. They are numbers MS103 – Jacob’s Well and MS 113 the Chaucer. Peter Hoare has spent many hours working on an up-to-date inventory. The list is in numerical order so you should find quite a bit of info about MS103 and MS113. For those interested in knowing more you can copy and paste the link: <https://collections.salisburycathedral.org.uk/home>.*



JOHN IVIE - A PLAGUE OF REFORMS

In view of the COVID 19 pandemic I thought it would be apposite to look back at Salisbury’s previous experience to show that some good can come of even the most tragic event. I am indebted to the BBC’s Legacies series for the following.

The plague that hit Salisbury in 1627 was not all bad news. Or so John Ivie, city Mayor and reformer thought (left, his own book, *courtesy of Salisbury Museum*). He claimed the plague was caused by ‘all the drunkards, whore-masters and lewd fellows of the city’ and that the scourge was a perfect opportunity for complete social reform. And with his friend, ally and Recorder of Salisbury, Henry Sherfield and Councillor Matthew Bee, he set about not only preaching the virtues of religion, but putting them into practical use for poor relief at a particularly dark time in English history.

Rats have a lot to answer for in England, especially in the Tudor and Stuart periods. In the 14th-Century, the disease they spread was known as the “Black Death” and across Europe, historians agree that it accounted for about 25 million deaths. It spread rapidly along trade routes, from major ports to cities and then into neighbouring villages. Infected fleas from the poisoned rodents latched on to the backs of men and would randomly jump ship and share their deadly venom. With little or no medical knowledge available, the infection they carried decimated the population wherever it struck. Ever since the Black Death in 13th-Century, and up to 1660, plagues re-visited these shores with devastating effect.

Plague was a reminder of the transience of everything to do with life. It ate into the very fabric of society, bringing work to a halt, and destroying wealth at all levels. Financial stability was fractured at a local and national level. Wherever the plague struck, various preventative measures would be employed. Culling of dogs, that were so often running wild in the streets, and rat poisoning went some way to stem the plague's spread. But famine was also a key factor –

it reduced the resistance to disease, and with widespread social depravation, was a major cause of death.

Treatment for the plague was inconsistent. Bloodletting, or cutting open the vein nearest the infected part of the body, was commonly thought to be one of the best ways to treat the plague disease. The blood that exuded was black, thick and vile smelling with the added attraction of a greenish scum mixed in it. But despite all the so-called remedies, doctors just had to admit they had no cure. "Pesthouses" were established a few miles away from the areas in which infected people would be sent – very little help was given and food was rarely distributed.

The epidemic that broke out in Salisbury in March 1627 was another such visitation and the wealthy fled Salisbury's city walls only to leave the poor to the grips of the plague. Their only succour came from Mayor John Ivie, a few aldermen, and two petty, or parish constables - the only people of authority to feel the social compunction to remain in the city.

Professor Paul Slack, Principal of Linacre College, Oxford, in his book 'The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England', said: 'It is not difficult to appreciate the feelings of the woman in an infected hovel in Salisbury who told John Ivie that "my husband and two of my children cannot speak to me" and that she hoped for better days. Plague brought grief shock and a pervasive sense of impotence'. 'It was the church's business to console the bereaved and fortify the dying; but it is doubtful whether its ministrations were any more effective during epidemics than other times. That many priests fled with their respectable parishioners is evident from the applause given to, or claimed by, those who stayed'.

In the early 1620's, Ivie and his philanthropic friends, City Recorder Henry Sherfield and Councillor Matthew Bee embarked on a three-pronged attack on the causes of the poverty being experienced in Salisbury (right, attributed to Jacques Bellange, *courtesy of Salisbury Museum*). Ivie, took the forthright stance of striding the streets in his official robes of office as a symbol of resilience, in the hope that it would be seen as a measure of support for the citizen's plight. He coerced the few remaining healthy citizens to raise money for the poor. Their plans, driven by their Puritan faith were based on disciplining the poor and eradicating the sin of idleness to achieve a true and real reformation in the city. Not all of the plans came to fruition.

Ivie had one that would have seen the River Avon navigable through to Salisbury to have been paid for by all those who had business with or smoked tobacco, but this was not supported in Parliament, and was discarded. The three proposals that were implemented had a radical effect on Salisbury for some 20 years. But they were not without profound political divisions in the governing classes. Changes in the systems of relief for the poor were established between 1623 and 1628. These became an important part of the survival of the city through the 1627 plague. They involved



fundamental changes to the workhouse, establishing a municipally owned brewery and storehouse.

The workhouse in St Thomas's churchyard was enlarged, and became a place where the poor were taught a trade, with Matthew Bee as one of the governors and Ivie as Master of Works (the later workhouse on the edge of the Close, shown below). The brewery was run by the workhouse authorities and the profits from the controlled sales were intended to set the poor to work in the city. By 1626, these arrangements for the employment of poor children had been added to those of the workhouse and brewery and they were detailed in the publication 'Orders Touching the Poore' – these records are the clearest surviving record of the idealism and organisation of the new experiments. The plans for the municipal brewery were modelled on a previously held experiment in Dorchester which did not survive – it was hit by the adverse reactions from the local brewers and the inability for the funds from sales to repay a loan that was taken out to set the scheme up. However, in Salisbury, Ivie urged alehouse keepers and innkeepers to patronise it to protect it against similar adverse reactions from Salisbury brewers.



Above, Salisbury Parish Workhouse 1880, *courtesy of workhouses.org.uk.*

An attempt to have an Act of Parliament passed to support it failed, as did a bill encouraging the establishing of common brewhouses to be called "houses of the poor", but the Salisbury Brewhouse survived. The storehouse was John Ivie's personal crusade. He set it up when trading was severely disrupted during the 1627 plague, but it also continued after that date. An initial starter fund of £100 was collected throughout Wiltshire for the relief of the infected poor of Salisbury. It was intended to provide victuals for the poor at cost price and also in the future a "parish relief" was to be set up by way of issuing tokens rather than cash – this was to stop the poor spending their dole money entirely on drink. Ivie described his full intentions in a letter to Recorder, Henry Sherfield: 'There should be provided a storehouse, stored with wholesome provision for the poor, as this year they have had it, which is, as I will prove, £100 saved in £300. And we would make certain tokens with the city arms in them.'

‘The tokens should be from a farthing to a sixpence, and this money should be current nowhere but at the storehouse where they should such diet as is fit for them, both for victual of bread, butter, cheese, fish, candles, faggots and coals, and some butchers appointed to take their money for flesh if need be. And the old course of collecting the monies should stand as before only they [the collectors] should bring it to the Mayor and take so much in [tokens] to pay the poor.’ ‘So if they will needs be drunk they should either work for the money or steal it. In my opinion if this way takes effect we shall avoid drunkenness and beggary’.

But despite all the best intentions and efforts of Ivie, Sherfield and Bee, the schemes failed in the long term. They were largely effective in relieving poverty and famine during the plague years from 1627, but did not last long after that. The brewhouse was not well patronised by the local innkeepers and alehouse-keepers and it was unable to free itself from debts from the initial set-up which were estimated at £1000 in 1627 (left, brewery in Castle Street now Woolley & Wallis.



There was the Friary Brewery in St. Ann Street and the George Brewery in Rolleston Street and of course Gibbs Mew in Gigant Street). The mechanism for setting up the training of children was similarly thwarted by a lack of enthusiasm and support from private interests, and the most imaginative element of the three-prong scheme. Salisbury Cathedral oversaw all of Ivie's reforms, the storehouse and token scheme collapsed by 1640 as it proved to be too inflexible and many people were found to be trading their tokens for cash and still then spending on copious amounts of drink.

According to Ivie, at the time of his retirement from Mayoral duties, he was called before the City Recorder, Henry Sherfield and the assembled Session Committee and told: "You have done your country good service, for which we are all beholding to God and you". Despite the failure of the schemes, nobody has seen fit to detract from the short term achievements of Ivie and his team. It is seen that the overall failure was due, in part, to what was seen as a return to "old ways" – that of disciplining the poor and reducing the cost of their relief.

John Ivie, reformer, Puritan and loyal servant to Salisbury has been remembered in the city with a street and a bridge bearing his name, but today how many people would realise that his work and efforts were the precursor to what we would see as a co-operative system of trade and employment?

So let us hope that Salisbury reacts as well to this crisis and learns the lessons of co-operation, innovation, compassion and self-sufficiency.

For this edition's piece of useless knowledge how about the fact that the childrens' rhyme *Ring a ring of roses* ... has nothing whatever to do with the plague.