

PLAGUE, SMALLPOX, CHOLERA AND TYPHOID

IN TODAY'S age of modern medicine and improved living conditions, it is easy to forget the impact that some long gone killer diseases had on Twerton in the past.

Scattered historical records give glimpses of diseases that would have unsettled the people, taken lives and left the parish of Twerton struggling to cope in the aftermath.

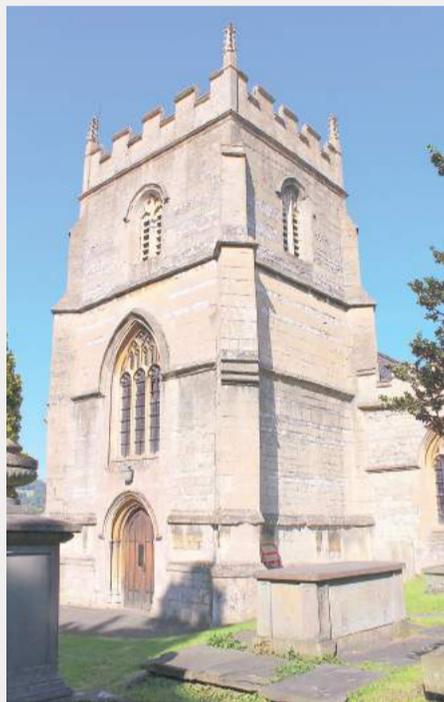
The Black Death

In 1348 a dreaded plague that had already swept through Europe arrived in British ports. Known as the Black Death, the disease spread throughout England killing roughly half the population of the country.

The Vicar of Twerton died from the Black Death that year and although his is the only death recorded, there would certainly have been many other fatalities in the parish.

The Bath Community Academy (formerly Culverhay School) at the bottom of Rushill, is built on land that was once occupied by a medieval settlement called Barrow.

The settlement was abandoned near the end of the 14th century, and it is interesting to speculate that the ravages of the Black Death a few decades earlier may have contributed to its decline.



The church in Twerton lost its Vicar to the black death in 1348

Smallpox

Another deadly illness, smallpox, was widespread in centuries gone by. In Twerton some of the victims of smallpox were buried beneath the church floor. Tragically, the Twerton church register reveals that four children were buried on the 26th of October 1714 having died from smallpox.

Another entry in the register is dated the 22nd of November 1729 and records the further loss of a child to smallpox:

"A child of Mr Isaac Sperin, the master clothier, buried in the Church near ye 7th seat. 7 years. Small Pox."

Isaac Sperin was a wealthy pioneer of the mechanised weaving industry in Twerton - a reminder that such diseases showed no favouritism towards either the families of the rich or the poor.

Cholera

In 1832 a major cholera epidemic that had taken grip in cities across the country, broke out in Bath. It was not yet understood

that cholera is caused by a water borne organism and is usually spread by poor sanitation.

When the epidemic reached Twerton a mile and a half down the road, the victims were cared for at the Poor House which stood at Mill Lane, near where the Gemini Hair Studio is today.

Typhoid

Another instance of disease linked to bad sanitation occurred when the railway line was constructed through Twerton.

The family of the Curate (a clergyman who served the church) lived at Clyde House. The house and its land had been purchased by the GWR company, ready to build the railway through its lower grounds.

Unfortunately the railway disturbed some drains and two of the Curate's children contracted typhoid and died.

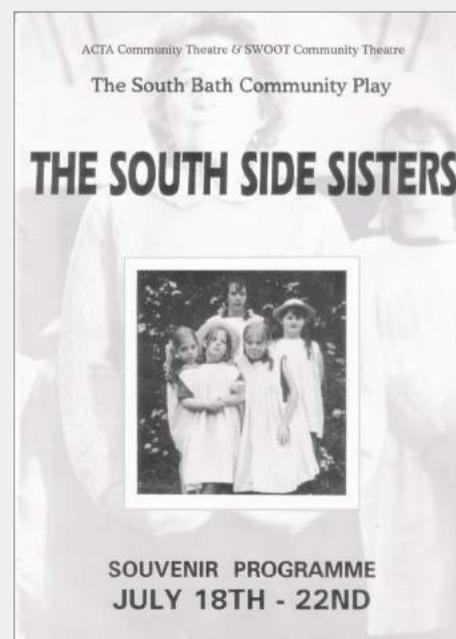
Clyde House is the tall building next to a bus stop in Twerton High Street where people catch the number 5 bus into town.



An old photo of the rear of Clyde House in Twerton High Street

Within living memory

In 1995 a play was produced with details based largely on the memories of elderly Twerton residents. Called *The South Side Sisters*, at one point it illustrates healthcare in about the 1920's.



You can watch this play online at: <http://tinyurl.com/84wh3ws>

In the play, a girl is forced to eat her lunch in a freezing cold school yard and then becomes seriously ill in the evening. Friends of the family call upon the doctor to help but he refuses to come out until he is paid. Eventually he agrees to visit in the morning, but the girl dies in the night.

The older generation people whose memories went into this play, could remember a time when the community had to contend with critical illnesses unaided by a National Health Service.

Think of the help available today from our GP surgeries, call-out doctors, health visitors and the local hospital, and be thankful.