

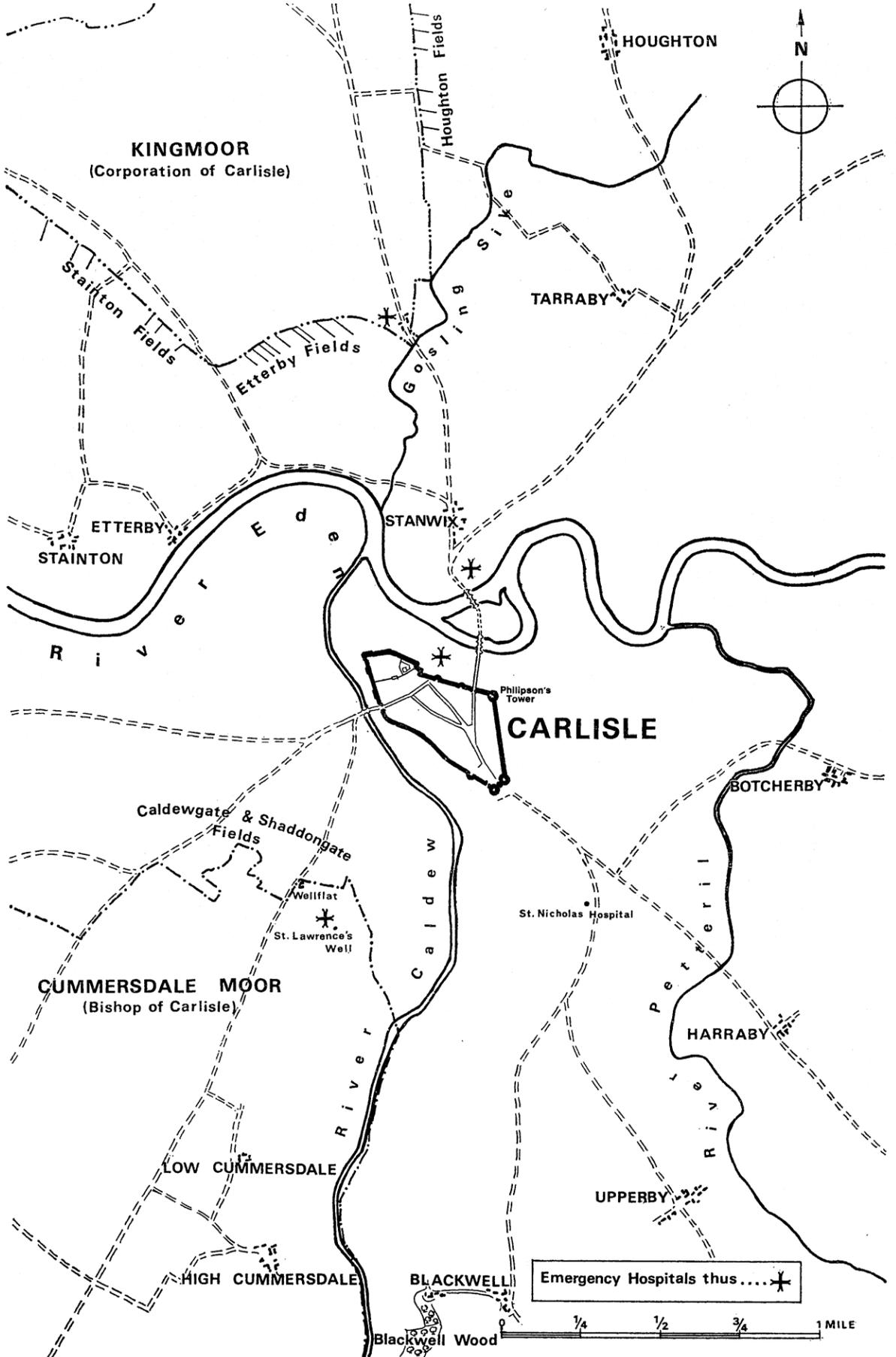
ART. VI.—*The plague in Carlisle 1597/98.* By J. HUGHES.

Read at Grange-over-Sands, September 4th, 1970.

IN 1889 Dr Henry Barnes contributed an article to *CWI* xi 158-186 on "Visitations of the Plague in Cumberland and Westmorland", pointing out that these epidemics were of several kinds, including visitations of the true Oriental plague, a disease characterised by inflammatory boils and tumours of the glands.

The earliest reference to local pestilence dates from the year 685 shortly before St Cuthbert's visit to Carlisle. Others occurred in 1201, 1319, the Black Death of 1349, in 1380, then again in 1554 and the pestilent sickness of 1597-98. This last visitation is said to have reached Cumberland from Newcastle, breaking out at Penrith on 22 September 1597, and only abating in December of the following year when 2,266 people are said to have died from it in that town. This number would appear to be an almost incredible figure, especially when only 583 deaths are recorded in the Penrith parish register. A possible explanation, put forward by the late Rev. Henry Whitehead, is that the figure of 2,266 covers the whole of Penrith rural deanery. The inscription on the Penrith stone gives the number of Carlisle's victims as 1,196. Dr Barnes states that with the exception of "the inscription on the Penrith stone there are no records of the numbers afflicted with the plague at Carlisle and none of the local registers go so far back". He quotes from Jefferson that in 1598 £209. 9s. 10d. was raised in the year 1598 for the diseased poor.

It is strange that no further information has been



MAP (CONJECTURAL) OF CARLISLE, 1597.
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printed regarding this visitation, responsible as it was for the deaths of a large proportion of the population.

Recently a number of documents covering the plague in Carlisle have come to light. One of these is of considerable interest, giving as it does a list of the city householders in 1597/98¹ with an indication as to those families that were visited by the pestilence.

The number of the householders is 323 who are divided as follows:

Botcherdgate	.	105
Richardgate	.	55
Fisshergate	.	37
Castlegate	.	78
Abbeygate	.	43
Within the Colledge	.	5

The census was taken on 20 December 1597 and the number of households "visited" was 242. Figures against many of the names may indicate the number of deaths in each household. If this assumption is correct it would give a total of 149, one house having 15 ascribed to it.

It is interesting to compare the list with that of the 1377 poll-tax return² and to note that the number of householders in the 16th century is not greatly in excess of the number of families given in the earlier return. More surprisingly only about 13% of the surnames listed in the plague census are identical with that of the 14th century. One can only hazard a guess at the population figure for 1597, but by basing an estimate on the number of householders given, it cannot have been much more than about 1,300.³ If this is so, then the 1,196 deaths ascribed to Carlisle on the Penrith

¹ Mounsey-Heysham papers, Record Office, Carlisle.

² J. L. Kirkby and A. D. Kirkby, *The Poll-Tax of 1377 for Carlisle*, CW2 lviii 110-117.

³ Alderman Timothy Haddocke, writing to Sir John Lowther a century later (11 September 1685), stated there was a population of 1,790 in 309 houses. Of these, 133 housed more than one family (Lowther Muniments, Record Office, Carlisle).

stone is obviously too high for the City alone and must refer to the rural deanery.

Nicolson & Burn (ii 234) state that the plague began at Michaelmas in 1597 and continued until Michaelmas of the following year. A more precise date of its first appearance is not known but a City Council meeting was apparently held on 3 November when the phrase "necessar^ye observations thought meate to be kept in this Cittye, the third day of November 1597: for the avoydinge of further infection of the disease of the plague then suspected there to be, if so it please God to blesse there carefull indeavours therein", would seem to show that Carlisle's sufferings began not long after those of Penrith.

The observations are of a most practical nature and were meant to limit the spread of the disease. Infected houses were "sealed off": the provisioning of their inhabitants arranged for and orderly arrangements made for the removal and disposal of the dead. The first demand was that a census be taken by two substantial honest citizens, who were to take view and make note of every particular householder and the number of their family or household. As already stated these amounted to 323 but there was no individual census.

Daily visits were to be made to discover cases of sickness; these were to be made by honest experienced men known to be of sound judgment for the discerning of those "visited", who were to be supported in the event of death. Their burial and the "cleansing" of their houses was to be arranged for.

One of the resolutions laid down was that a weekly collection must be taken in each street for the better relief of every poor person "visited". The money was to be placed in charge of a member of the City Council who also supervised its distribution. Nicolson & Burn (ii 234) give a detailed financial statement of the money

collected. It is noted that of the total of £209. 9s. 10d. the amount raised by the citizens themselves was only £14. 4s. 10d. — an average of 10½d. per household. This is hardly surprising if one considers the enforced stoppage of work and earning power which must have been brought about. The largest amount came from the Common Chest, and donations were received from several county gentry. Among the subscribers to the fund were Bishop Meye and his successor Bishop Robinson, both of whom died of the infection.⁴

Henry Leigh, Steward of Burgh, writing to Lord Scrope on 6 November 1597, reported:

I give God thanks all things are in good quietness, saving the vicitacion of God, which increaseth notwithstanding Mr Maiore his dewtiful care to prevent the same, which I do assure your honour is therein as in all your lordship affayres most vigilant.⁵

Sympathy and advice was sent in a letter of 30 November 1597 from the Council of the North sitting at York to “our very lovinge Friends the Maior and Aldermen of the Cyttye of Carleslie . . .” The principal cause of the outbreak was said to “proceed from the Lord’s wrathe powred downe for sinne . . .” It was further remarked “that it is the more dispersed by the recourse of people from towns and places infected unto suche as are free from the same and also by carryeing of goods from place to place, without observeinge anye good order . . .” Enclosed with the letter was an abstract of Privy Council Orders which were to be executed without delay. The minister of each parish within the jurisdiction of the city was commanded to read the rules to his parishioners and also to “set them up in the Church, and Markett place, and other publicke places in the Cyttye . . . that every-one may have accesse unto them”.

⁴ CWI xi 184.

⁵ Calendar Border Papers, ed. Joseph Blain (1894), ii 443.

The city medical officer was Edward Alburgh who worked in co-operation with Edward Aglionby under the direction of the Mayor, Richard Bell, whose own household did not escape infection. Dr Alburgh was required to provide all the medicine and plasters necessary for the relief of the sick. The poor were attended without fee or charge for medicine, but those who were in a position to pay were expected to do so.

Various methods of treatment were recommended by the College of Physicians. Fumigation of all wearing apparel with burned Virginia Cedarwood or Juniper was advised. House fumigation was sometimes achieved by plunging hot stones into a bowl containing vinegar and rosemary. The use of perfumes was also advocated. It was considered that medicines of garlic, cloves, sage or wood sorrell were effective. Some authorities favoured the use of purgative remedies, others practised blood letting. One of the strangest antidotes was to make a hole in an egg, remove the contents and fill the shell with saffron. The egg was then roasted until the shell yellowed when it was pulverised and half a teaspoonful of mustard added. The mixture was dissolved in posset ale and drunk lukewarm. Poultices of turpentine and treacle were used on sores and carbuncles.

The city gates were placed in charge of honest and discreet men whose orders were to prevent the admission of anyone known or suspected of infection or who came from any place where the infection was thought to be. "Foreigners" and wandering beggars were expelled from the city. In *Extracts from the Court Leet Rolls of the City of Carlisle*, edited by R. S. Ferguson and W. Nanson, reference is made to a Court Leet held in 1597 when it was decreed: "We crave your worship to command the bedles to put forth of this cittye Robert Bonehome and one Grace Towry." From other sources it is known that at an early period

Carlisle had a suburban population, and during the visitations none from Rickergate, Caldewgate or Botchergate were admitted without a permit from the city bailiff. Movement within the city itself was also restricted.

Leigh, writing again to Scrope on 25 November 1597, commented —

... The sickness continues in the suberbes and disperced places of the cetie as before. I make bold to remind you of some poor men in prison on slight suspicion only, that they might be bailed on sufficient surities, to answer at your lordships return: the rather as they are miserably poor and the prisons pestered and I fear infected with sickness, for two died yesternight out of the sheriffs prison.⁶

Some compassion was shown to these unfortunate people in that a weekly allowance of 1s. 2d. was disbursed by the City authorities to relieve their sufferings.

The principal "viewers" were Edward Aglionby and Edward Alburgh. Arrangements were made to pay the stipends of the officers and ministers, of the corpse bearers and the corpse winders and viewers, the latter apparently receiving a flat rate of ten shillings per week. A similar sum was paid to those who cleansed houses where all the inhabitants had died, or had fled to the fields for safety. Help was also given to those of the poor who survived though in daily contact with the sick, and to such as had recovered from the plague.

The City Chamberlain's accounts for the period have been preserved,⁷ and record that on 6 October 8s. was made available for the relief of the poor of Rickergate. It would appear that Thomas Jefferson who was granted the sum of 2s. on the same day was one of the earliest sufferers of the pestilence. Further entries give confirmation of the thoroughness of the

⁶ Calendar Border Papers, ii 465.

⁷ Record Office, Carlisle. D/MH/I, p. 65.

Authorities in their attempt to contain the outbreak.
 Item for woode the 13th of October for raylinge up the vennale
 head next to Castlegate wherein Thos. Jefferson dwelte ij^s
 Item delivered to them which weare closed up in Thomas
 Jefferson house the xvth of October in flesh xvij^d in haver meale
 xvj in drinke xd in bread xij^d all iij^s vij^d
 Item payed to James Keethe which he had disbursed for Thos.
 Jefferson before the sayd xvth of October xiiij^d

A few days later it was necessary to temporarily
 remove the barricades.

Item payed that night that Thomas Jefferson wyff dyed to a
 wright for taking downe and settinge up the rayles at his vennall
 end and for nayles v^d

A trough of wood was constructed "to convey freshe
 and fayer water to the visited in Jefferson his house
 and vennale". A load of peats were also delivered on
 another occasion, and on 21 October it was recorded
 that threepence was expended on the supply of ale to
 "the visited persons".

The accounts reveal that charitable items of expendi-
 ture rose very rapidly from 14s. od. in the first week
 to £4. 2s. 6d. per week by August of the following
 year when the plague was at its height. At this period
 there were some fifty-five persons receiving sums
 varying between sixpence and one shilling.

The following extracts provide grim reminders of
 the fate of many of the citizens:

To the wynders & buryers vij^s vj^d
 To the Buryers for makege a holle to burye clothes ij^s
 Item for a barrowe to carry John Bowman wife to her grave . iij^d.

We are accustomed to hearing that the standards
 of sanitation of the 16th century were low, but medical
 opinion appeared to be aware of the need for cleanli-
 ness. The sale of corrupt flesh or fish was deplored
 and the removal of filth from the streets advocated.
 The practice of permitting swine to range up and down
 the thoroughfares was also deprecated. The highly

infectious nature of the disease was fully appreciated and houses infected were marked with a red cross. Pursuant to an Act of 1603, orders were issued "that every house visited be marked with a Red Cross of a foot long, in the middle of the house, evident to be seen, and with these *usual* Printed words, that is to say, 'Lord, have mercy upon us' to bee set close over the same Crosse, there to continue until lawfull opening of the same house". These provisions would probably be in current use at the time. Forty days were considered to be the period of quarantine.

It is not known when the practice of removing sufferers to pest-houses began, but such places were common enough during the period under review. It is unlikely that the existing Hospital of St Nicholas was used, but other properties were commandeered to deal with the emergency. At least one of the turrets on the city wall was taken to house the infected:

Item to Bowman's Children and the woman that kept them in Phillopson's tower xiiij^d

Item for a pitcher of drinke to the persons in Phillopson's tower x^d

Item to Bowman's childe at two sevrall tymes at the Turret
ij^s j^{ob}

In addition several emergency isolation hospitals were speedily built outside the city walls. These shelters, variously termed lodges or shields, were situated at Gosling Syke, Stanwix Bank and others directly under the city wall on the Bitts. A deputation was sent to persuade the Bishop of Carlisle to agree to some being built within his liberty at St Lawrences Well. A quitclaim by Adam de Stafful of Carlisle to William of Arthuret, dated 10 January 1360/61, gives the precise location of this long forgotten well "... a field called Galouburfeld and two acres in le Wellflatte near St Lawrences spring".⁸ The place-name Wellflat

⁸ Record Office, Carlisle. Records of Carlisle Corporation.

has survived, and reference to the 1865 Ordnance Survey plan shows Spittal Moor, both of which are on the Carlisle-Cummersdale road. The Bishop at first refused permission but later agreed to lease the land at a rent of ten shillings.

In each case the shields were carefully sited near a water supply and it is of interest to note that the choice of site at Gosling Sike and St Lawrence's Well may well have been influenced by the fact that at both these points the limit of the cultivated fields was reached and the moorland waste began. The shields of Gosling Sike were erected on the Kingmoor owned by the Corporation. The Bitts was also owned by the City but a rent was paid to Mr Blennerhasset for the Stanwix Bank site.

From the accounts a fairly accurate picture of the shelters can be obtained. Judging by the number of men employed on their construction, they must have been quite small in size, consisting of a simple timber-framed building with walls of "reyce" (brushwood hurdles). Doors were fitted and roofs were flacked (turfed). On completion, straw was provided as a floor covering.

Item payde for felling & dressinge of woode in Bleckall wode to ij wrights the 12 of October..... iij^s vj^d
 Item for carryinge of the sayd woode to St. Lawrence Well . iij^s
 Item for the Chamberlen's charges about the same xij^d
 Item to ij Wright ij days buyldinge the lodges at St. Lawrence Well iiiij^s
 Item for the caryage of the ryce to & fro Carell when the Ld. Bissop would not suffer the lodges to be there viij^d
 Item for doores yet to certayne cabbins there afterward ... xvj^d
 Item for one for gravenge of flacks to those cabbins ij^s
 Item for leading the sayd flacks from moore viij^s
 Item for wallinge & theakinge the same v^s
 Item for strowe to the same vj^d
 Item by Mr Maior's command in breed & drinke then xij^d

It is surprising to learn that despite the seriousness of

the situation delinquents saw fit to carry out acts of malicious damage :

Item for repayinge the same lodges after some eavell disposed persons had cast them downe iij^s

Each hospital was provided with a nurse who was paid a weekly sum of two shillings and sixpence. Janet James took up her duties on the 1 July 1568 and apparently survived the plague for she was drawing her pay at the end of September when the accounts are ended. The nurses may have had some assistance to carry out their duties: "to wenches at the sheelds lately at Cecell How house xviiij^d." Strict orders were enforced regarding the burial of the dead. Special biers were to be provided for carrying the corpses, which had to be buried between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. No corpse was to be lifted until the bellman gave word that the grave had been prepared and the beadle had to walk before those carrying the body to give people warning as he came.

In some parts of the country the corpse bearers were known as "tarr-coats", presumably on account of their protective clothing. Burial places were usually apart from the rest of the churchyard graves. By the middle of the following century this practice became a definite Statutory Order :

That none dying of the Plague be buried in Churches, or Church-yards (unless they be large, and then to have a place assigned for that use [where other bodies are not usually buried] Boarded or Paled in Ten foot high) but in some other convenient places, and that a good quantity of unslaked lime be put into the graves with such bodies, and that such Graves be not after opened within the space of a year or more, lest they infect others.⁹

This would explain the reason for the considerable

⁹ "Rules and Orders to be observed by all Justices of Peace, Mayors, Bayliffs and other Officers for the prevention of the spreading of the Infection of the Plague, published by His Majesty's Special Command 1666."

number of Penrith victims who according to the parish registers were buried on the Fellside. It is regretted that the Carlisle registers for this period are not available but no doubt a similar practice prevailed there also.

The precise location of the burial grounds must be conjectural but it is unlikely that they were to the south or east of the city. In the former direction the Royal Forest of Inglewood was reached at Harraby, whilst the land to the east was of a swampy nature in the 16th century. Bearing in mind the siting of the emergency hospitals, the logical conclusion would be to assume that burials took place both on the Kingmoor and the Cummersdale Waste.

The Chamberlain's Accounts end with entries for 30 September 1598 when it can be assumed that the plague had run its course. Dr Alburgh, who had ministered to the sick throughout the visitation, died some two months later.¹⁰ It is interesting to speculate that he may have fallen victim to the pestilence. Certainly his house in Abbeygate was listed as being "visited".

The social consequences of such an epidemic were profound. Many families were completely wiped out, surnames vanished, old trades and skills disappeared. Twelve months of the plague in a city as small as Carlisle must have disrupted both civil and ecclesiastical life completely. Little or no building would be possible and it would have left the city most vulnerable from a military point of view if its defence had rested in the hands of the local inhabitants.

If any good can be seen in a tragedy of this magnitude it may be that the survivors were of the strongest stock and, therefore, produced in their turn a sturdier breed of citizen.

¹⁰ Will dated 13 November 1598, inventory of goods taken 12 December 1598. Record Office, Carlisle.

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