

Cholera Victims Speech

Cholera is a bacterial disease linked to poor sanitation in water supplies. Asiatic Cholera originated in India, in the early 1800s. This strain is notorious throughout the world for being a particularly excruciating and virulent form of that illness that can kill within about three days. Historically, outbreaks of Asiatic cholera spread rapidly. The victims of Bridgwater's Cholera outbreak in 1849 were one such case.

The Bridgwater epidemic in the 1840s was a part of the second wider European pandemic of the disease at the time. Knowledge pertaining to the disease was sparse and there was no consensus on how it was spread. Medical authorities in Bridgwater were split between Catagionists, who recommended quarantine of all cholera sufferers and Miasmatists, who recommended increased cleanliness and sanitation.

As there had been a previous outbreak of cholera in Bridgwater in the early 1830s, a health committee already existed. This committee was comprised of the Mayor, four councillors and any other councillors who were also doctors. Owing to newspaper reports of cholera, this committee re-convened in early 1849.

The reoccurrence of cholera in Bridgwater in the late 1840s is attributed to many different sources. Oysters sold that were washed in contaminated water, a traveller from Bristol who collapsed and was brought to the workhouse, ignored calls for better sanitation. Regardless of its origin, this wave of the disease was truly devastating. Many sufferers and relatives of sufferers were forced from their homes as buildings were whitewashed with hot lime. The death toll for all parishes covered in the Bridgwater Poor Law Union was 235; 88 of which were from Eastover. These deaths mostly took place in August 1847. Medical facilities at this time were overstretched. Despite £428 worth of improvements being carried out to the Bridgwater infirmary, the Bridgwater

Health Committee also thought it necessary to convert the old poor house in Old Taunton Road into a temporary hospital.

By September that same year, a day of solemn prayer was held across the town, with all shops closed and all churches holding services. Churches gave services of thanksgiving in December that year, also. Today, we echo that solemnity, and that giving of thanks. We echo the words upon this memorial “From plague, pestilence and sudden death, Good Lord deliver us”.