

LINK Box Colerne Rudloe

Unprecedented

This is a word we've all become used to hearing in the last six months. It's used to describe events that haven't been experienced before, and in the lifetime of most of us the Covid-19 pandemic is accurately described as unprecedented. But in the 20th century there was another unprecedented event, the so called "Spanish Flu" of 1919 to 1920 that killed around 20 million people. And even earlier than that there was the plague village of Eyam in Derbyshire. Being brought up in Sheffield, about 20 miles from Eyam, it is a village I've visited on a number of occasions.

The plague in Eyam was thought to have originated in a delivery of cloth from London, where, in 1665 the bubonic plague was rife at the time. The cloth was delivered to the local tailor, Alexander Hadfield, and his assistant, George Viccars, noticing that the cloth was damp, opened it up releasing the fleas that it contained. He died within a few days and more in the household began dying soon after. The disease then took hold and the local minister, Reverend William Mompesson took charge of the situation. Led by the minister, the villagers decided to limit the spread of the disease and put the village into quarantine, refusing entry to outsiders. They closed the graveyard, relying on family members to bury their own dead in the surrounding fields, closed the church and held services in a natural amphitheatre on the edge of the village, giving the opportunity for those attending to stand well apart.

Putting the village into quarantine led to marking stones outside the village where merchants from other towns and villages could leave supplies and receive payment from the coins left in hollows made in the stones, the hollows filled with vinegar as a disinfectant. The plague killed 260 people from Eyam, thought to be around 75% of the population, with one woman losing her husband and six children in the space of a week. So, all of the changes to our way of life over the last six months are nothing really new.

At LINK we're just starting to get back to a different normal, with more clients needing trips to surgeries and hospitals and as you might have read in the last article, we need drivers from younger age groups than many of our current volunteers. If you would like to help out please get in contact by ringing the LINK number **07970 617617**.

Steve Drew