Treating the Black Death

Enquiry: How far did the Black Death change the Medieval World?

KS3 History - Lesson 2 of 4

Miss K Hillman

Comprehension Questions

1. What did people believe was the main cause of the Black Death?
2. How would people try to stop poisonous air from infecting them with the disease?
3. What happened to people visiting Walsham that came from infected areas?
4. How did the villagers of Walsham prove their religious devotion to try and escape the Black Death?
5. Why could villagers not go and visit friends or family that were ill?

The Church

The Black Death was mainly believed to have been sent by God as punishment for people's sins. To save themselves from God's punishment, the villagers of Walsham urgently began to **confess** all of their sins. They did this to ask God for forgiveness so that they might be spared. The villagers also gave the church 40 shillings to build a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary to show their devotion to God. Some villagers went on a **pilgrimage** to Our Lady of Walsingham that was a famous holy site. Here the villagers could pray in the **chapel,** which was believed to have healing powers. The villagers left feeling like they would be more protected from the Black Death.

Avoiding Poisonous Air

Medieval people also believed that poisonous air (**miasma**) carried disease. The villagers decided to stop this poisonous air from infecting them by surrounding themselves with stronger smells. One way was to hold flowers to their nose. Another way involved burning **incense** in their homes so that they would only smell sweet air. Another more extreme method, however, was carried out by one villager called Edmund de Welles. Edmund decided to collect the contents of each toilet in his home, empty it into a barrel to create a very disgusting smell. He would then breathe in the disgusting smell so it would prevent the poisonous air infecting him with the Black Death.

Quarantine

It was also believed that the Black Death could be spread by a victim looking, touching or breathing on someone else. Many villagers began to **quarantine** themselves to stop the spread of the disease. To begin with villagers would send away visitors from other villages or towns. Sometimes the villagers even threw stones at these visitors if at first they refused to leave. Villagers became very careful, even avoiding funerals of people they believed died of the Black Death. On of the Walsham villagers, Mansur Shucford, only had a handful of people pay respects at his funeral despite having no signs of the disease and a free dinner was put on for all!

Glossary

Confess - Admit that you have committed a crime or done something wrong.

Pilgrimage - A journey that is made to a holy site to show religious devotion.

Chapel - A Christian place of worship, usually smaller than a church.

Miasma - poisonous air which medieval people believed spread disease

Incense - When burnt this will release a strong smelling smoke.

Quarantine - Where diseased people will be isolated to prevent others from catching the disease.