Castleton and Its Old Inhabitants.

Chapter 7. Smallpox in Castleton.

Smallpox was one of the greatest scourges across Europe during the 18th Century and our village did not escape. There were seven outbreaks in Castleton between 1731 and 1774 - there was no treatment or cure. At least one hundred and thirty six entries in our Parish Registers record death as having been caused by smallpox during these years alone – the victims mainly children.

Perhaps the earliest glimpse of the devastating effect of smallpox on the village was when the Rev. James Clegg visited Castleton and noted in his diary on 3rd January 1731*;

“*I dined at Fford and went after with sister Rachael to Castleton. Visited many children in ye smallpox, about twenty have died there of that disease and about sixty are ill.”

Rev. Edward Bagshaw was our vicar at this time and he had indeed recorded all the burials of these children, and more, adding an “S” after each entry denoting their death from smallpox. Families included the Halls, Hydes, Barbers, Nalls, Hows, Kirks, Ashtons – the list of old Castleton names goes on and on.

*At this period the old form of numbering years was used, when the new year would commence on 25th March, rather than 1st January. The Gregorian calendar was adopted in 1752.

Register of baptisms, marriages (to 1773) & burials 1647-1650, 1722-1783 D1432 A/PI 1/2.
Buried on 6th February 1731;

“Jana filia Roberti et Maria Hyde S”.

Jana was barely a year old when she died; baptised in 1730, the Register tells us the family were “de Peaks-arse”, living in or near Peak Cavern.

1737 to 1738

The outbreak of 1737 into 1738 brought twelve more deaths from smallpox – again Rev. Bagshaw marks them with “S”. Joseph and Elizabeth Hall lost two of their children during this out break – son Joseph buried 16th March 1737 aged 5, and daughter Ann a week later, just ten months old.

A little girl named Charlotte, the illegitimate child of Alice Cock, was born during the 1731 smallpox outbreak – she died from the disease in the 1738 outbreak, aged 7.

Part of the Burial Register from 1738. The burial of Charlotte Cock can be seen at the bottom. Register of baptisms, marriages (to 1773) & burials 1647-1650, 1722-1783 D1432 A/PI 1/2.
1746

The next outbreak, in 1746, Rev. Bagshaw writes in the register, “The town was visited with the Small Pox” with another six deaths. Again he writes “S” after each smallpox death.

One who died was Mary Dakyn who lived at Pindale; she was buried here in the Churchyard on 27th October 1746. Her widowed husband, John, paid 3 shillings to have a stone laid over her grave sometime after her death – Rev. Bagshaw made a note of this in his Daybook in 1747. This is likely to be the flat stone close to the sundial – the worn lettering can just be made out.

*Burial of “Mary wife of Jn Dakyn of Pindal: S” on 27th October 1746. Register of baptisms, marriages (to 1773) & burials 1647-1650, 1722-1783 D1432 A/Pl 1/2.*

There are several Dakyn graves in this area of the Churchyard; Mary’s grave is likely to be the flat stone seen here on the bottom left of the picture. Although very worn, most of the lettering can just be made out.
In 1753 Rev. Bagshaw wrote again “The Small Pox was broke out in the town” in the Register. It claimed another twenty six lives, with brothers and sisters being buried together on the same day as the disease swept relentlessly through the village.

Buried in 1753;

“14th November, Betty and Hannah daughters of Thomas and Margaret Burroughs S”

“29th November, Thomas and Alice son and daughter of Anthony and Betty Hide S”

“2nd December, Isaac and Jacob sons of Jacob and Dorothy Eyre S”

The gravestone of young sisters Betty & Hannah Burrows. “Betty and Hannah Burrows were buried the 14th day of November 1753. Few were their days...” can still be made out, but much of the remaining inscription has worn away.

Betty was 5 ½ years old, Hannah 13 months.

1759

In 1759 Rev. Bagshaw writes again, “The Small Pox broke out in ye town” in the Register with another twenty one lives taken – these three entries show some of the areas in the village affected;

“4th November, James son of John & Ann Hall: Dunsker: S” (Dunscar Farm)
“13th November, Mary daughter of John & Ellen Nall: S betwixt the waters” (possibly referring to the Island)

Cluster of cottages that form “The Island” seen here circa 1880. Castleton Historical Society

“19th November, Elijah son of John & Mary Hall: slippery stones: S” (now just called The Stones)

Part of the area in the village referred to as “The Stones”

1765

In 1765 another nine were lost to smallpox, including members of the Royse families (also written Rose) who were involved in lead mining here for centuries. Buried in 1765;

15th March, Martha daughter of John and Martha Royse S.

On their gravestone is written “Here lieth the body of Martha daughter of John and Martha Rofe who died in 1765 aged 4 years”

Rose (Royse) gravestone bottom left.
Buried in 1765;

3rd August, Ann daughter of Daniel and Betty Royse S.

Ann was aged 4 when she died from smallpox - a short life - unlike her father and mother who were 91 and 81 years old respectively when they died. Their flat gravestone tells us Daniel was an “experienced miner” when he died in 1820.

1774

By far the greatest toll was during the outbreak of 1774 when thirty seven died from smallpox. The first victim was Mary daughter of John and Anne Stafford, buried 22nd April 1774. The Vicar, John Muschamp Dover, wrote “smallpox” against her name in the Register and continued with “Sp” for all the other smallpox deaths.

Twenty eight were buried in May alone, often two or three on the same day.

One who died was Margaret “Peggy” Barber, the 4 year-old daughter of John and Mary Barber, on 14th May 1774. She was buried the day after her death.

This family’s gravestone is still fairly clear to read and includes their little boy Robert who had died in his infancy (again of smallpox) in the 1759 outbreak.

John & Mary Barber’s gravestone (right) with detail (below) of Margaret “Peggy” who died from smallpox on 14th May 1774.
Many children who died from smallpox were just remembered on the family gravestone as dying “in infancy”; with no age, nor year of burial, or cause of death.

These include William and Sarah Morten’s little boy, William, who “died an infant”.

Only perusal of the Parish Baptism and Burial Registers tells us more;

William died from smallpox; he was buried on 28th May 1774, around 14 months old.

William & Sarah Morten’s gravestone, with young William who “died an infant”.

Also Sarah, daughter of George and Dorothy Eades; although she was their only child to die from smallpox, her name is written on the gravestone with her brothers and sisters who “all died infants”.

The Parish Registers tell us Sarah died from smallpox, she was buried here on 1st May 1774, aged 4.

The Eades gravestone, on the left of the photograph.
Smallpox and the Winnats Pass Murderers.

The entrance to Winnats Pass, circa 1890, where two brutal murders took place around 1758.

The murderers were allegedly Nicholas Cock, Thomas Hall, John Bradshaw, James Ashton and Francis Butler.

Castleton Historical Society

Members of the murderous group of men, who allegedly killed a young couple in the Winnats Pass during the mid-18th Century, have their names linked again due to the smallpox outbreaks in Castleton. Some lost children to the disease, shown here at their burials;

1746 29th September, Betty daughter of James & Mary Ashton: S

1759 20th October, Thomas son of Thomas & Ann Hall: S

1765 6th March, Charles son of Nicholas & Mary Cock: S

I’m including here another child, “Mary daughter of Nicholas and Ellen Bradshaw” who died from smallpox in December 1753 – new and on-going research is showing that her father, Nicholas Bradshaw, is very possibly the true identity of the murderer named Bradshaw.

There is much more research to be done on the Winnats Pass Murders - however one little boy can surely have his name “cleared” of the suggestion that he grew up to become the murderer James Ashton. One Jacobus (James) Ashton was baptised on 27th March 1726, son of Benjamin and Dorothea Ashton. It has been suggested this child became the murderer; however it is recorded in the Parish Register that this particular “James Ashton” died from smallpox in 1731. He was aged 5.

Part of the page showing the burial of Jacobus (James) Ashton, son of Ben & Dorothea Ashton on 12th December 1731.

Register of baptisms, marriages (to 1773) & burials 1647-1650, 1722-1783 D1432 A/PI 1/2.
Smallpox in the 19th Century.

There was an outbreak of smallpox in 1820 when Charles Cecil Bates was our Vicar. He wrote “The Small Pox began this year” with the register of the burial of James Needham on 4th January 1820, aged 57. However, he didn’t make a note of those who died from the disease later in the register.

Newspapers of the day reported “notable” deaths in their obituaries too.

Robert How Ashton, farmer, lead smelter and merchant, lived at Cryer House in Castle Street.

His first wife, Harriet, died of smallpox in 1829 aged 27. She was buried on 22nd July 1829.

Later in the 19th Century when the railway was being constructed, the influx of workers and “navvies” brought fresh fears to Castleton and surrounding villages of outbreaks of smallpox. There were cases in 1892 and 1893 and the population were rapidly offered vaccination and re-vaccination. Dr Ellison was our village doctor and the vaccination was offered free of charge – nothing more could be done to stamp out the disease at that time,
and known cases were taken to the “Infectious Hospital” at Chapel-en-le-Frith Union Workhouse.

The threat from smallpox, as far as we know, does not exist anymore; the worn-away gravestones in the Churchyard and the yellowing pages of the Burial Registers act as reminders of all those who died here from this dreadful disease.

Smallpox was a highly contagious disease caused by a virus with no treatment or cure. Those who survived the disease were often left terribly scarred, commonly on their faces, and sometimes blinded. In 1722 Lady Mary Wortley Montague introduced inoculation to prevent smallpox, from her travels in Turkey; it was eyed with suspicion and tried on criminals condemned to death.

Around the mid-18th Century medics began to understand that infection by cowpox could actually give immunity from smallpox.

Towards the end of the 18th Century a vaccination was developed by Dr Edward Jenner using cowpox – truly a blessing to the human race.

Smallpox was declared eradicated in 1980 by the World Health Organisation.
Bibliography


Derbyshire Record Office; Register of baptisms, marriages (to 1773) & burials 1647-1650, 1722-1783. D1432 A/PI 1/2.

Derbyshire Record Office; Burials Jan 1813 – March 1887. D1432 A/PI 5/1.

The British Newspaper Archive; Derby Mercury 20th May 1768.


Smallpox and the Winnats Pass Murderers.

Derbyshire Record Office; Register of baptisms, marriages and burials 1662-1722. D1432 A/PI 1/1.

Derbyshire Record Office; Register of baptisms, marriages (to 1773) and burials 1647-1650, 1722-1783. D1432 A/PI 1/2.

Derbyshire Record Office; Expenses claims from Coroner for honour of Tutbury. 1761-1769. File 1 Q/AF 8/30.

The British Newspaper Archive; Derby Mercury 21st April 1785.


Smallpox in the 19th Century.

Derbyshire Record Office; Burials Jan 1813 – March 1887. D1432 A/PI 5/1.

Derbyshire Record Office; Castleton tithe town centre map D2360/3/141b.Castleton tithe award D2360/3/141c.


Acknowledgements

Newspaper images reproduced with the kind permission of the British Newspaper Archive; http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/. Images from Castleton Parish Registers reproduced courtesy of Derbyshire Record Office and Revs Ian Davis & Josephine Barnes. Thanks to Castleton Historical Society trustees for permission to reproduce our Archive photographs, and also to Karen Green for her help with Latin.

Kay Harrison May 2016.