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Some islands in the British Isles have very few people living on them – in 2007, Lundy and Piel Island had less than 30!

So who lived here first?

We don’t know much about the first people who lived in Britain. People didn’t write things down back then, so most of our information comes from fragments of bone, bits of stone, fossils, pottery, and other artefacts. From these simple clues, experts have built up a basic picture of life in Britain thousands of years ago. But the picture isn’t complete. There is still a lot we don’t know. It’s like an enormous jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing!

The latest thinking is that for hundreds of thousands of years, there were probably no humans in Britain at all. But there were animals. These animals crossed over a ‘land bridge’ that linked what we now call the British Isles to mainland Europe.

Then, about half a million years ago, people from Europe began to arrive. These were Britain’s earliest immigrants! They were hunter-gatherers who (as their name suggests) lived by gathering food (like nuts and fruit) and by killing animals for meat and furs. They moved around in small groups, sheltering in caves or building basic huts. They learned skills such as lighting fires and making sharp flint tools (see Source B).

FACT!

In this book, the word ‘Britain’ will generally be used instead of the term ‘British Isles’ when describing the nation as a whole. However, the main island is now divided into different countries (England, Scotland and Wales) and the second largest island (Ireland) is divided into two areas (the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland).

Source A: Some islands in the British Isles have very few people living on them – in 2007, Lundy and Piel Island had less than 30!

Source C: An early settlement. The one-room huts were built of wood and mud with pieces of turf or straw thatch for roofs. Note the crops in the fields and the livestock fenced into pens. Most of the tools people used were made from wood and stone rather than iron or other metals – which is why this period is usually known as the Stone Age!

More settlers

For many thousands of years, life in Britain remained largely unchanged. More hunter-gatherers arrived from Europe and others left; some fought with other groups whilst others stayed isolated. Then, around 5000 years ago, an important change happened. People learned how to farm and produce their own food rather than having to hunt around for it. New settlers coming to Britain from Europe brought wheat and barley seeds to grow crops. They also brought animals for meat, including pigs, sheep and goats, and they owned tame dogs too. They built more permanent homes and cleared large areas of woodland for farming (see Source C).
7.1A We’re all going to die!

In the spring of 1348 the people of Britain were gripped by fear. A killer disease was spreading across the country and killing thousands and thousands of people. Whole villages were being wiped out and no one seemed able to stop it. The disease was known as ‘Black Death’ and it would go on to kill around one out of every three people!

Read the following accounts of the impact the disease had on people. Victims of Black Death really did suffer from the symptoms described by the villagers pictured here. Also, the causes of the disease were all genuinely believed by people at the time. As you will discover, it is no wonder people were so scared…

Mission Objectives

- Define the main symptoms of Black Death.
- Discover what people thought caused the disease at the time and how they tried to protect against it.

It’s 12 August 1348 and I am so worried. Father Peter has visited most of the villagers in this village and says that lots of people have been unable to work today. He says many people are hot and sweaty, like they have a fever, and that their muscles and bones ache. We are to pray that it is not the terrible disease that everyone is talking about. My friend Eleanor tells me that her mother has the fever. It’s been a week since Ellie Carter’s mother became ill…

Eleanor Carter, who works for the local landowner
- 26 years old
- Married, two children

We have decided to dig a large pit just outside the village in which to bury all the dead. But will it be big enough?

Father Peter, local priest
- Married, two children

We have decided to dig a large pit just outside the village in which to bury all the dead. But will it be big enough?

Eleanor Carter’s mother is now covered in a rash for a few days now and his boils are getting bigger. Perhaps we’ll close to death. I know Emma Langdale and her sister daughter are in bed today with a fever and even Father Peter is ill. I was worried about my youngest son who was up all night sneezing and sweating.

Emma Langdale, a baker’s wife
- 26 years old
- Three children

More and more people are becoming ill. And it affects anyone rich and poor, good and bad. Just yesterday, I was called to Emma Langdale’s bakery because her little boy has a fever. Why him, O Lord? What harm has he ever done? And Eleanor Carter’s mother is now covered in a red and black rash. She says she tried to stick a needle into one of the boils last night but it wouldn’t burst. Nothing seems to work.

Father Peter, local priest
- Married, two children

People are dying! Twelve died during the night and three more already today, including Eleanor Carter’s mother. Before she died, she was screaming for water. Eleanor gave her some, but her throat was so swollen that she couldn’t swallow. Perhaps God punished her for drinking ale on Sundays. Eleanor said that the boils under her arms burst as she died and smelly black pus dripped onto the deathbed. All the Carters are ill now and I fear for their lives.

Sir James Bickley, local landowner
- Owns lots of land that the villagers work on
- Married, three children

Work

1 Write a sentence to explain the word ‘symptom’ using a modern-day example of a common symptom of an illness in your answer.
2 a From what you have read, identify at least five symptoms of Black Death. Try to put them in the order in which a victim would get them.
   b Can you think of any reasons why the disease was called ‘Black Death’?
3 a In what ways did people try to treat the disease?
   b List any reasons why people thought someone might catch Black Death.
Over 1000 years ago, a small army from Denmark landed on the English coast and tried to steal as much as they could before sailing away again. However, their leader was captured and the angry English mob chopped off his head. The men then split into two groups and kicked the severed head around amongst each other. And this is how football in Britain began.

The game soon became known as 'mob football' when all the men from one village played another. They usually met up once or twice a year on public holidays such as Shrove Tuesday (Pancake Day). It was very violent. There could be as many as 500 players (including women sometimes), with few rules, no referee and the goals several miles apart. In Workington, an old rulebook said that players could use any method to get the ball to its target 'except murder'! The ball was a pig's bladder, stuffed with dried peas or sawdust. Sometimes a game was played with several balls!

‘After lunch all the youth of the city go out into the fields to take part in the ball game. The students of each school have their own ball. The workers from each city craft also carry balls. Older citizens, fathers and wealthy men come on horseback to watch the juniors competing, and to revive their own youth. ‘You can see their inner passions aroused as they watch the action and get caught up in the fun.’

’Banned’

Football was regularly banned. In 1314, the Lord Mayor of London banned it: ‘The hustling over large footballs causes great uproar in the city.’ Despite the threat of imprisonment for anyone continuing to play, the ban was ignored! In 1331, King Edward III became the first king to officially ban football by royal decree. He said that people were playing it so much they were forgetting to practise their archery skills. The king was worried that if a foreign army invaded England, men would have forgotten how to use their bows and arrows properly.

Indeed, football was one of Britain’s most banned games. Between 1314 and 1667, it was officially banned by more than 30 royal or local laws. Richard II, Henry IV and Henry VII all tried to ban it, but people were so determined to play that they carried on regardless. In Scotland, King James I once famously ruled that ‘na man play at the fute-ball’, but the Scots loved the game so much they were playing football in Edinburgh the very next week.

‘Discover the origins of football in Britain.
• Evaluate how football in the Middle Ages differs from football today.’

‘Mob football’ is still played in some parts of Britain today. Try to find out a bit more about this sport. Where is it played? Who plays it? How often? What are the rules? How do the players score?

‘A monk once described it as a devilish pastime. More a bloody murdering practice than a sport.’

‘A more modern view of football in the Middle Ages. A monk once described it as a devilish pastime. More a bloody murdering practice than a sport.’

‘A modern game of football. Can you spot any differences from mob football of the past?’

FACT!

In 1321 the Pope issued a special letter of forgiveness to a player who had accidentally killed an opponent. A few days later a Londoner wrote that players used to ‘retire home as from battle, with bloody heads, bones broken and out of joint and bruises that will shorten their days’.

By 1450 players in some towns introduced a new rule to try to reduce the number of accidents: the ball could only be kicked, not carried or thrown.

5 Life in the Middle Ages
Assessing Your Learning 3

What were the consequences of Black Death?

As historians, you will know that events (like wars or rebellions) usually have lots of different causes. You should also know that there are often lots of different results of an event when it takes place. These results are sometimes called ‘effects’ or ‘consequences.’ This assessment is going to look at the consequences of Black Death, the killer disease that hit Britain in the fourteenth century. Look at the sources carefully and answer the questions that follow.

SOURCE A: From Knighton’s Chronicle 1337–1396 by Henry Knighton.

‘Sheep and oxen wandered free through the fields and among the crops, and there was nobody to drive them off… When harvest time came, higher wages were not enough to get people to gather in the crops which rotted in the fields.’

SOURCE B: From the records of Eynsham Abbey, around 1385.

‘The King sent an order to all the counties that labourers should not be paid more than before the plague. But the labourers were so proud and stubborn that they would not listen to the king’s command. If anyone wanted to employ them he had to pay them what they wanted or lose his fruit and crops… Then the king ordered many labourers to be arrested and put in prison.’

SOURCE D: From Knighton’s Chronicle 1337–1396 by Henry Knighton.

‘It is sad but the whole world was changed for the worse. People were meaner and more greedy than before, even though they had more things. They were jealous of each other and there was an increase in the number of fights, arguments and law cases.’

SOURCE E: Written by Jean de Venette around 1348.

‘At the deserted village of Wyville in Lincolnshire the land is worth little because it is poor and stony. It is not being used because there are no people left to farm it after the plague.’

SOURCE G: The introduction to a law from 1376.

‘As soon as masters accuse their workers of bad work or try to pay them less, they leave and quickly find jobs in new places at higher wages. Masters dare not upset their workers and have to give them whatever they ask for.’

Over to you

Now it’s time to analyse the sources and think about what they tell us about the effects of Black Death.

Work

1. Firstly, copy out and complete the table below, which gives some of the effects of Black Death. Read each source again and tick the effects that it mentions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Wages for farm work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1346</td>
<td>5 pence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1349</td>
<td>5 pence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1353</td>
<td>10 pence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Some villages were deserted</th>
<th>There was a shortage of workers</th>
<th>People wanted higher wages</th>
<th>People became mean and greedy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The king has asked you to write him a brief report (no more than 200 words) on the consequences of Black Death. Use the sources on these pages to help you.

Assessing Your work

In a good report, you would…
- identify some of the effects mentioned in the sources
- select information from some sources to help write your report to the king
- organize your ideas to produce structured work, using the correct historical terms.

In a better report, you would…
- identify at least one of the four main effects from each of the sources
- select information (including quotations) from the sources and use it correctly when writing the report
- organize your ideas to produce structured work, using the proper historical terms and dates.

In the best report, you would…
- identify each of the effects mentioned in the sources and categorize them correctly (remembering that some of the sources mention several effects)
- explain the effects of Black Death in an accurate and detailed way, perhaps saying why some effects are more important than others, or will have long-term consequences
- select, organize and use relevant information and use the correct historical terms to produce structured work.

Plague has hit Britain many times since the outbreak in the 1300s. Most famously, plague swept through London and other parts of Britain in 1665. Find out about another outbreak of plague. When was it? Where were outbreaks recorded? How many died?