

VILLAGE HISTORY LESSON PART 6

Then we had trouble with the Scots who repeatedly raided the border counties. After the Battle of Bannockburn this culminated in the Great Raid of 1322 carried out during the First Scottish War of Independence by Robert the Bruce (from whom my wife could claim direct ancestry, for which I can only on her behalf posthumously apologise). The raid began by attacking the area around Carlisle then crossed into Yorkshire and penetrated ultimately as far as our area of East Riding, resulting in property being burned and destroyed, valuables from the wealthy and abbeys being stolen, and some residents and livestock being captured and taken back to Scotland.

Before that came a succession of poor harvests “The Great Famine,” in 1315 to 1317 and then the Black Death. There are no records of the village going back that far but it would be surprising if our community had escaped. More likely we suffered as so many other villages like Eyam in Derbyshire where at least 260 villagers died out of 350.

So in these unusual times spare a thought for life in 1356 to 1363. No food other than what you grew. No picking up Amazon deliveries at Harewood Bridge (because they would not risk the pestilence). No hot meals delivered to your door. Only rumour from an outside world you were cut off from.

If you were wealthy a “doctor” from Knaresborough would arrive in a long cloak and a hood with a protruding nose to issue quack medicine. And as you walked through the village passing doors with black crosses to signify a death you see by the Star and Garter a cart with your dead friends piled on ready to trundle to a pit which could have been on the north side of the church where recently skeletal remains were found. Aren't we fortunate?

Latest research estimates that it is likely that the Black Death swept away around 60 per cent of Europe's population. There followed several more visitations of the bubonic plague, the worst being in London before the Great Fire in 1665. It is still

around; there were three cases last year in China from where it probably originated, but don't tell that to Donald Trump who would then no doubt Twitter an inflammatory insult.

Next time: monasteries and iron ore.

Part 5 quiz question: where was the old butcher's shop?

Answer: more or less where Best Kept Secret can be found.

Part 6 quiz question: An easy one this time – where were the village almshouses?