

The Coronavirus Plague in Alne

A Personal Diary by Robert Brech

Well, Step Three of the release from lockdown happened on 17-May, as per the Roadmap timetable (see below) and the sky didn't fall in.



But, despite excellent progress on the vaccination of all adults, the increase in cases in some hotspots, particularly in the metropolitan Northwest, forced a re-think on Step Four. On Monday 09-June, the Prime Minister announced a further 4-week delay and that Step Four would not take place until 19-July.

This really seemed absurd and to be driven by fear rather than data. Consider the statistics as at 16-June:

- Covid cases are occupying fewer than 1% of English hospital beds¹;
- UK weekly smoking deaths were 1,500² while UK weekly Covid deaths were 108³, just 7% of the smoking deaths. Why such an emphasis on Covid?
- UK average weekly deaths are 10,000. Covid deaths represent currently about 1% of this. Cancer deaths are thirty times higher than Covid deaths⁴.

Nevertheless, the rules are the rules and we are where we are. But the general disquiet increased as people tuned in to watch England progress to the Round of 16, then the quarter-

1 Source: NHS England
2 Source: NHS Data
3 Source: UK Government
4 Source: Cancer Research UK

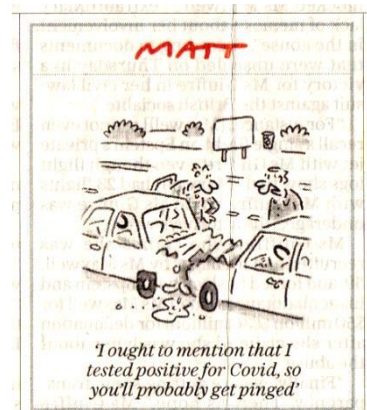
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finals and then the semi-finals of the delayed Euro 2020 football competition and watched the huge crowds at Wembley and in the streets, while at the same time Wimbledon was accepting not far off capacity crowds in the two show courts. How could this be allowed when we were still restricted to just two households meeting in our homes?⁵

As we entered July, there were 385,000⁶ children self-isolating as a result of the rules requiring classes or school bubbles to be sent home if one child recorded a positive Covid test. NHS consultants living in Alne were reporting that large numbers of NHS staff were off work at home looking after these isolated children and that hospital services were suffering as a result. This seemed to be another draconian policy which had severe negative effects on children coupled with negative effects on the wider world; to little benefit, as everyone agreed that children were the group least affected by the virus. But widespread efforts to get this policy changed for the last three weeks of the school summer term fell on deaf ears. And Alne Primary School was affected as the whole of Year 6 was sent home to self-isolate for ten days following a positive Covid test in that year.

Disquiet increased further when the Secretary of State for Health, Matt Hancock, was caught in a passionate embrace with a member of his staff; never mind the morals, this was a clear case of breaking social distancing rules and, as the architect of the rules, he had no option but to resign. But it was observed that the government was generally out of touch and seemed happy to create the rules but not to follow them.

The NHS track and trace app was next in line for public disapproval. In the first week of July, there were more than 520,000⁷ people who had been forced to self-isolate for 10 days as a result of being “pinged” by the app. This meant that they had apparently been in contact with a positive Covid case for more than 15 minutes and at a distance of less than two metres. But it quickly became clear that the app was over-sensitive and was picking up people incorrectly. One person was even detected through the wall of an adjoining semi-detached house. But the absence from work of these half-a-million mostly-vaccinated people created further pressures on business, on the NHS and on transport and public services generally. We noticed the effect on the hospitality sector in particular when we were down in Tenby later in July. Every restaurant and hotel were asking for staff and some restaurants were closing mid-week in order to concentrate what staff they did have at the busier weekend times.



By way of distraction, we attended another online seminar from Magdalen College, Oxford, this time by Dr Michelle Pfeffer on the subject of '*Astrological forecasting of epidemic disease in early modern England*'. Astronomers were frequently also astrologers in earlier times and it was interesting to note the 1662 conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter within the constellation of Sagittarius which provoked the then astronomer/astrologer Richard Edlyn to predict that "*we have great cause to fear an approaching plague*". He was, of course, proved correct by the great plague of 1665. A similar conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn took place at

5 The official answer is that Wembley and Wimbledon were being run as experimental studies. So all that hugging and kissing was clearly government-approved!

6 Source: UK Government

7 Source: BBC from UK Government

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the winter solstice in 2020. Had Richard Edlyn been alive and prophesied similarly, he would have been proved correct even more quickly!⁸

An interesting slide from this webinar is shown below and lists the causes of London deaths

The Diseases and Casualties this Week.

A Bortive	6	Kingfevil	10
Aged	54	Lethargy	1
Apoplexie	1	Murthered at Stepney	1
Bedridden	1	Palſie	2
Cancer	2	Plague	3880
Childbed	23	Pluriſie	1
Chriſomes	15	Quinſie	6
Collick	1	Rickets	23
Conſumption	174	Riſing of the Lights	19
Convulſion	88	Rupture	2
Dropſie	40	Sciatica	1
Drowned 2, one at St. Kath- Tower, and one at Lambeth	2	Scowring	13
Feaver	353	ſcurvy	1
Fiſtula	1	Sore legge	1
Flox and Small-pox	10	Spotted Feaver and Purples	190
Flux	2	Starved at Nurſe	1
Found dead in the Street at St. Bartholome v the Leſs	1	Stilborn	8
Frighted	1	Stone	2
Gangrene	1	Stopping of the ſtomach	16
Gowt	1	Strangury	1
Grief	1	Suddenly	1
Griping in the Guts	74	Surfeit	87
Jaundies	3	Teeth	113
Impoſthume	18	Thruſh	3
Infants	21	Tiſſick	6
Kild by a fall down ſtairs at St. Thomas Apoſtle	1	Ulcer	2
		Vomiting	7
		Winde	8
		Wormes	18
Christned } Males — 83	}	Buried } Males — 2656	} Plague — 3880
Christned } Females — 83		Buried } Females — 2663	
Christned } In all — 166		Buried } In all — 5319	
Increased in the Burials this Week		1289	
Parishes clear of the Plague	34	Parishes Infected	96

The Aſſize of Bread ſet forth by Order of the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen;
A penny Wheaten Loaf to contain Nine Ounces and a half, and three
half-penny White Loaves the like weight.

8 One has the feeling that astrologers, like present-day economists, follow the maxim "If you can't forecast right, forecast often". This ensures that at least one of your many forecasts will turn out correct.

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in one week of 1665. While 73% of the 5,319 deaths were from *'Plague'*, other causes which would be considered unusual today included: *'Griping of the guts'*, *'Rising of the lights'*, *'Frighted'* and *'Found dead in the street'*.

On Monday 12-July, the Prime Minister announced that Step 4 of the Road Map would indeed take place on the following Monday, 19-July, and that all legal restrictions would come to an end. But the imposition of “guidance” (much the same as the rules we had thought were being left behind) and refusal of some businesses and transport authorities to accept customers and passengers without masks soon made it clear that it was another government muddle. And how soon before we saw antagonism between those who favoured the health of the economy over the health of the largely-vaccinated population and those who continued to be nervous of the disease? Nevertheless the scientific modellers were out in force saying that this was a dangerous step, with the influential Professor Neil Ferguson predicting that it was “*almost inevitable*” that we would soon see 100,000 cases a day over the summer and possibly even 200,000 daily infections. As at 13-September, these dire predictions have completely failed to materialise.

During July, the Press at long last started to disclose the number of daily deaths from all causes in addition to the Covid deaths so that a proper comparison could take place as to the relative importance of the Covid deaths. I had highlighted this omission as a statistical hindrance to public understanding over a year ago, way back in May, 2020 (see Chapter 2). But a further complication then arose as it transpired that the NHS statistics were still being manipulated to paint a worst-case picture. If you were a symptomless Covid-carrier, you would not take a test and would not know. If you then broke your leg and went into hospital, you would be given a mandatory test and would then be included in the statistics for patients in hospital with Covid.

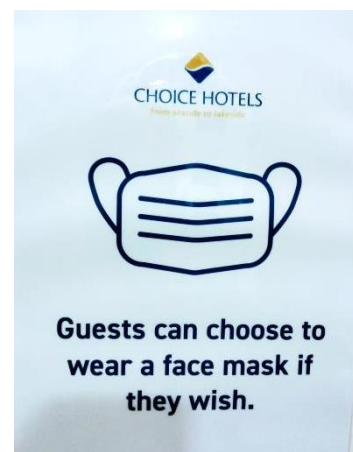


As we come into September, the government has relaxed almost all anti-Covid requirements in England although some authorities, particularly in the transport arena, have kept more binding rules in place. This gives rise to interesting interpretations. Some insist on their own rules (which they are entitled to do) such as the two peremptory examples shown on the left. Others give a more positive slant such as the example on the right from the Keswick Country House Hotel.



Confusion abounds and people are dividing into:

- nervous pessimists, among whom we count the lady who was killed while crossing the road because she was more interested in finding her mask than in watching the traffic⁹ and those who have fallen to their death or been seriously injured on London Underground because holding on to the handrail might give them Covid¹⁰ and
- rational optimists, among whom those of you who have been paying attention over the last couple of chapters will recognise your diarist!



⁹ Daily Telegraph 21-Jul-2021

¹⁰ Transport for London report Sep-2021

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In government, the divide is political. The opposition parties are generally wearing face masks in the House of Commons, the government MPs are generally not.

The “*Last Night of the Proms*” took place on 11-September. The Royal Albert Hall holds close on 5,000 and it was interesting to see a closely-packed audience, hardly a mask in sight, and all singing lustily to *Jerusalem* and *Land of Hope and Glory*.

Back on the local scene, Alne Village Hall held their first public event for more than eighteen months on 19-September, a play entitled “Holmes and Watson, the Farewell Tour” and it was again notable that hardly any of the audience of more than 40 people was wearing a mask. By definition, the audience must be of the optimistic nature, as the nervous pessimists would not have bought tickets, but it was nevertheless a very welcome local return to normality.

On 13-September, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) went on record to declare that fully vaccinated people are much less likely to die with Covid-19 than those who aren't, or have had only one dose. Actual figures show that, out of more than 51,000 Covid deaths in England between January and July 2021, only 256 occurred after two doses¹¹. Thus 99.5% of all the Covid deaths we have been reading about occurred in those who had not received two doses and the ONS confirmed that those vaccinated folk that did die were mostly people who were already “extremely clinically vulnerable”. Covid vaccination booster shots for the over-80s in Alne also started in September and this should further enhance the immunity of the local population.

Many people in Alne have taken the opportunity to holiday over the summer break, many in Scotland and also in places such as the Lake District, Cornwall and Wales. Some intrepid families have also braved the many and various rules, tests, costs and uncertainties to take holidays abroad but they are in the small minority. An unscientific show of hands at the Alne Tennis Club Presentation Dinner on 02-October showed that only one family out of the thirteen represented had gone abroad in calendar 2021.

As we move from summer to autumn, energy prices, fuel shortages, party conferences and the new James Bond film are filling the headlines. Will this be the last you hear of the Coronavirus Plague in Alne?

11 Office for National Statistics report 13-Sep-2021. Of the 51,281 deaths in England between 02-Jan-2021 and 02-Jul-2021, only 256 (0.5%) occurred in individuals who had had two vaccinations and who had not tested positive prior to 14 days after that.