

# Samuel Pepys' Diary

## Who?

Samuel Pepys (pronounce it "Peeps") is famous because he kept a diary. He began his diary in January 1660 and continued writing it until May 1669, when he was too blind to write.

It was a private diary, written in code, and never meant to be published.



However, it gives us fantastic evidence about life in London during the Great Plague and the Great Fire. It is a primary source as it comes from the time.

## QUESTIONS

1. Why is Samuel Pepys famous? [1]
2. What makes Pepys say that the Plague makes people more cruel to one another than to dogs? [1]
3. Why does Pepys think nobody will want to wear 'periwigs' after the plague? [1]
4. Why is Samuel Pepys' diary so useful to us? [3]
5. Using Pepys' diary entries, find evidence of the Lord Mayor's orders. [4]

## 30 April 1665

*"Great fear of the sickness here in the City, it being said that two or three houses are already shut up. God preserve us all."*

## 7 June 1665

*"This day, much against my will, I did in Drury Lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and 'Lord Have Mercy Upon Us' writ there – which was a sad sight to me, being the first of that kind . . . that I ever saw. It put me into an ill conception of myself and my smell, so that I was forced to buy some roll-tobacco to smell and chew, which took away the apprehension."*

## 10 June 1665

*". . . to my great trouble, hear that the plague is come into the city . . . but where should it begin but in my good friend and neighbour's, Dr. Burnett in Fenchurch Street . . . To my bed, being troubled at the sickness . . . and particularly how to put my things and estate in order, in case it should please God to call me away."*

## 12 August 1665

*"The people die so, that it now seems they are willing to carry the dead to be buried by daylight, the nights not being long enough to do it. And my Lord Mayor commands people to be inside by nine at night that the sick may leave their domestic prison for air and exercise."*

## 22 August 1665

*"I went on a walk to Greenwich, on my way seeing a coffin with a dead body in it, dead of plague. It lay in an open yard . . . It was carried there last night, and the parish has not told anybody to bury it. This disease makes us more cruel to one another than we are to dogs."*

## 3 September 1665

*"Up, and put my coloured suit on, very fine, and my new perwig, bought a good while since, but durst not wear, because the plague was in Westminster when I bought it; and it is a wonder what will be the fashion after the plague is done, as to periwigs, for nobody will dare to buy any hair for fear of infection, that it had been cut off the heads of people dead of the plague."*

# Why did the Plague die out?

The Great Plague of London broke out in spring 1665. Deaths gradually increased during the summer. From October the number of deaths began falling, but the Plague still continued into the next year.

Samuel Pepys writes on 26 October 1665 that, “...the town begins to be lively again, though ... most shops shut up.” He adds more on 22 November, writing that, “...great hopes of a further decrease, because of this day's being a very exceeding hard frost.”

Although it is almost impossible to measure, more than 40,000 Londoners died from the Plague in 1665. By 1666 less than 2000 Londoners died from the Plague. In 1667 deaths from the plague were under 30. By 1680 Plague had virtually disappeared from the whole of England.

## WHY?

There was an improvement in hygiene and cleanliness. Better and cleaner water supplies, cleaner streets.

New shipping routes to the East meant the rat and flea infested routes were avoided

There was an advance in scientific knowledge and medical care – Doctors began to see the connection between dirt and disease

The black rat was driven out by the brown rat – which didn't carry the plague.

The rat and human population began to develop an immunity to the plague

Living conditions of the poor improved – healthier diet, better clothing & housing improvements.

The germs, rats and fleas perished when the filthy slums of London were destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666

Put the title 'Why did the Plague die out?' in your exercise book, and answer the questions below:

1. What reason does Samuel Pepys suggest might have reduced the deaths? [2]
2. How long did the plague last? [N.B. Include dates and number of deaths] [3]
3. What reasons do YOU think best explain why the plague died out? Explain why you chose the reasons you did, AND why you didn't choose other reasons. [5]

### Glossary

Hygiene – being clean and healthy

Immunity – where the body's defence against a disease gets stronger

Perish – to die out