

# Time Travel Tuesday: In Times of Adversity

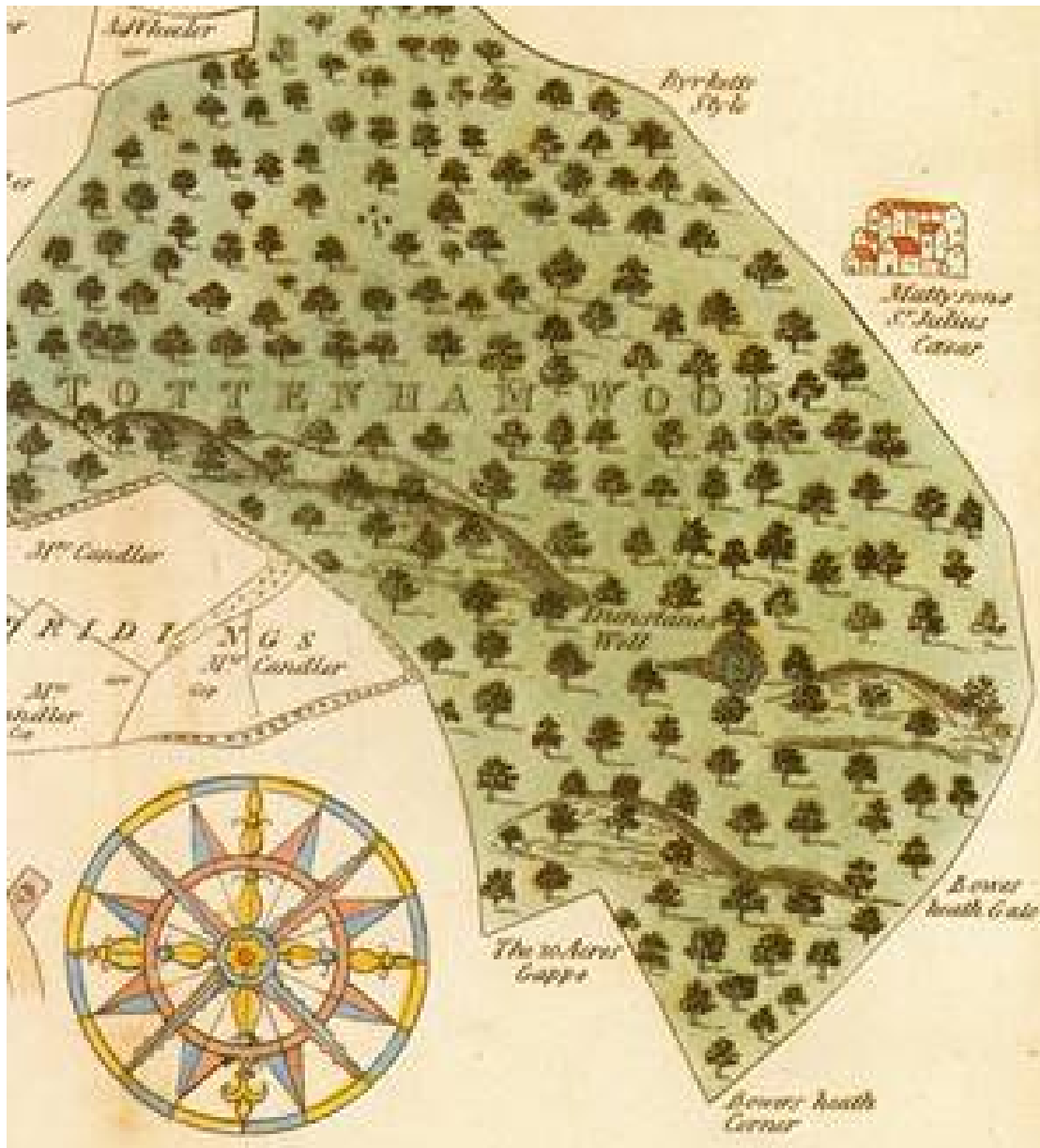
## Tuesday 19 May 2020

Welcome to Time Travel Tuesday: In Times of Adversity – sharing our heritage from Bruce Castle Museum & Archive.

Last Tuesday was [International Nurses' Day](#), when we looked at Florence Nightingale's contribution to nursing and her focus on limiting the spread of infections and disease amongst the war wounded. In today's post, we are taking a step further. With scientific, technological and societal developments, we will be looking briefly at how people responded locally when humankind has been faced with turbulent times of adversity, struggle and challenges in our community's health, similar to what we are currently going through today with the pandemic crisis.

We will travel back in time several centuries, to the 1500s – a time when the [plague](#) was rife. In the late 1500s, [Sir Julius Caesar](#) (1558 – 1636) lived at a mansion known as Mattyson's on the Tottenham and Hornsey border, to the west of Tottenham Wood farm. He was the son of Caesar Aldemarle, the Venetian physician to both Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, and was known for his philanthropic deeds in helping the poor. On 6 September 1593, he wrote to Lady Compton of Bruce Castle, the Lady of the Manor of Tottenham. As Judge of the Admiralty Court, he asked whether her house could be used as a safe place away from the sickness in London. It was for the use in particular of a member of his office and his family to isolate at a safe distance in the countryside in Tottenham. Given documents in the Admiralty Office record being written in Tottenham, it would look as though Lady Compton helped this family by giving them a place of refuge at a terrible time.





Sir Julius Caesar (left) and detail from 1619 map showing his residence on the Hornsey/ Tottenham border – Mattyson’s mansion house near to Tottenham Wood.

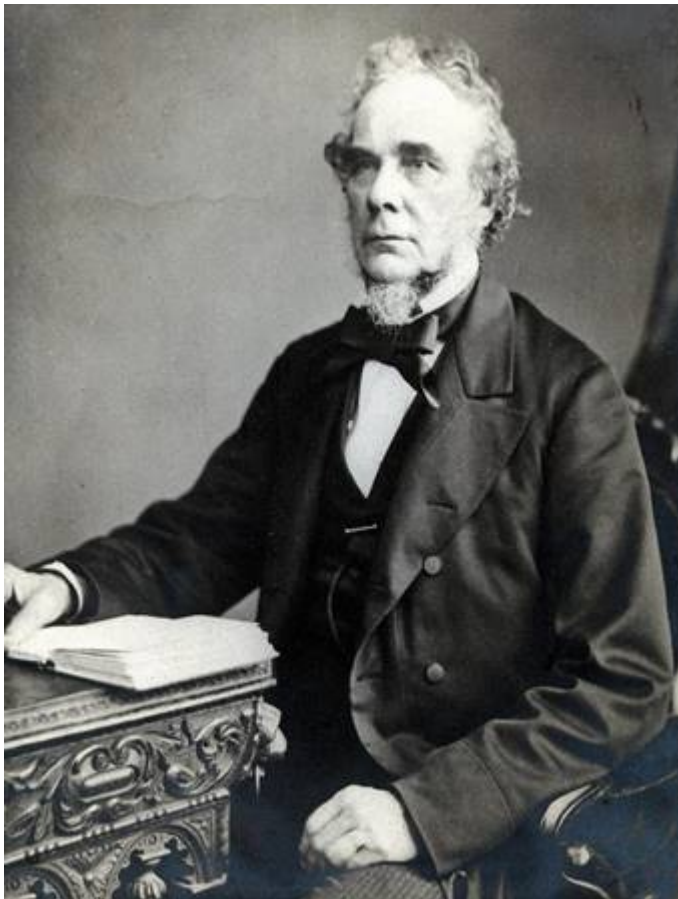
From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

By the time of 1665, when Samuel Pepys was writing, we can learn more from his diary about that devastating time of the Great Plague in the square-mile City of London. Today, some [locals in Crouch End might have caught a glimpse](#) of the past and seen what a 17<sup>th</sup> century plague physician attending the sick would have had to wear to protect themselves. If we look at the image (below) from the [Wellcome Collection](#) of a physician’s protective outfit, although it might look terrifying, we can see it did serve a very important purpose. The long beak-like masks were filled with aromatic spices or herbs to block out smell and was probably an effective filter of ‘bad air’ (*mal aria*) or airborne particulates.



*Abito di medico, ed'altre persone, che visitano  
gli appestati. Il medesimo abito, è di marrochino  
di Levante la maschera tiene gli occhi di cristallo  
ed un lungo naso ripieno di profumi.  
Dereinto dal Sig. Manger.*

Some of you might recall the *Bad Airs, Agues and Fever* exhibition we had at Bruce Castle in 2017 about the Tottenham chemist and quinologist [John Eliot Howard FRS](#) (1807-1883). His ground-breaking life-work in the study of cinchona bark and the discovery of the extraction of quinine helped in the fight to combat [malaria](#). We might not realise now, but even in this country there were severe outbreaks of malaria. In 1843, Tottenham's population expansion and rise in sewage pollution and unclean waters of the River Lea led to outbreaks on the Tottenham Marshes.



During 1831 and 1832 the whole of London experienced [Cholera outbreaks](#). The need to control and contain cholera and other deadly diseases meant a more systematic approach was required to manage the health of the ever-growing population of the UK. Albert Hill, whose family ran [Bruce Castle School](#) and was a pupil at the time, wrote how his fellow-pupils and staff were made to stay in isolation, unable to leave the school grounds for some weeks.

The Hill family, who ran Bruce Castle School from 1827, had had experience earlier on in fighting the spread of infectious fevers at their first school at Hazelwood in Birmingham. That same year, in 1827, at Hazelwood, the following report (below) was made about the fumigation, ventilation and cleansing of the school so that pupils were able to return:

*The School-house has, as was intended, been subjected, with the furniture, clothing, &c. to a thorough process of ventilation, fumigation, and cleansing; the different rooms have been newly coloured; and no means omitted to remove any latent infection which might possibly have existed: although the late uninterrupted health of the family has given sufficient reason to believe that these additional precautions were scarcely necessary. It is still, however, the intention of the Conductors to continue all precautions which their Medical Advisers may deem in any degree expedient. The House is provided with unusually ample means of ventilation.*

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

When Rowland Hill and his family decided to expand their school at Bruce Castle, his design for the new-build ensured there were ventilation and air-shafts – and also throughout the existing building.



View of Bruce Castle, c. 1890. On the right side of the photograph, on the roof, you can just see the large ventilation shafts emerging behind the chimney stacks. These would have brought a lot of ventilation into the building.

From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

As local historian and Vice-Chair of the Friends of Bruce Castle, Christine Protz, notes in her book, *Tottenham: A History* (2009) about the outbreak of cholera in Tottenham in 1831:

“It was these events that prompted local inhabitants to set up a provisional Board of Health in December 1831, chaired by Edwin Hill (1793-1876), Albert’s father. A survey of the parish was produced, identifying the main trouble spots.”

The [Public Health Act](#) was introduced in 1848 along with the development of local health boards to work within local parishes and vestries to keep their residents safe. Tottenham was one of the first pioneering areas to establish a local health board.

Cholera was initially thought to be caused by ‘bad air’, or a ‘miasma’. It was not until Dr John Snow put forward his theory of it being a water-borne disease in the 1850s, that scientists were able to contain the disease and develop better medical responses to treat the disease. To help curb the spread of cholera and other water-borne diseases caused by the contamination of the water supply, the civil engineer [Joseph Bazalgette](#) (1819-1891) was brought in to design London’s sewage system, with the first section opening in 1865. The sewage system we have today, is still the basis of London’s sewage management. Although it often struggles to cope with the demands placed on it by [21<sup>st</sup>-century London’s population](#), it has done a remarkable job to now.

You can see an amazing piece of Victorian technology that helped with sewage management at [Markfield Beam Engine and Museum](#) (MBEAM) in Tottenham. It opened in 1886 to help pump sewage away from Tottenham to sewage works in Beckton. If you haven’t seen the MBEAM as yet, once it is possible to do so, you

really ought to pay it a visit on a [Steaming Day](#), and see this powerful beam engine at work.



Courtesy and © Markfield Beam Engine and Museum

Tottenham was chosen to have one of the first Fever and Infectious Diseases Hospitals, following the outbreak of smallpox. One isolation hospital was located by the engine house of the beam engine at Markfield, and another was established at St Ann's Road, Tottenham. You can read a little more about these two hospitals and see the 1894 OS maps showing their locations on the [Summerhill Road website](#) (scroll down to the end). We also referenced in last week's Tuesday Daily Post the isolation hospital for Hornsey at Coppett's Wood, Muswell Hill. The North Eastern Fever Hospital (as it was first known at St Ann's) in Tottenham can be seen in the first photograph below, along with the Hornsey isolation hospital (second photograph).



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

We have heard from some of you recently, enquiring about when the last pandemic was. Just over 100 years ago, in 1918/19, the world was similarly in the grip of a pandemic. What became known as Spanish Flu, was an unusually deadly influenza pandemic caused by the [H1N1 influenza A virus](#). Its origins are obscure, but possibly arising first in overcrowded troop encampments where hygiene was poor, close to piggeries where the infection possibly came from birds. Its effect was devastating on the exhausted and malnourished populations in Europe, the Americas, Africa and Asia following the Great War, affecting young and old and particularly otherwise healthy young adults. Most of the deaths arose from secondary pneumonia, but there were also cases of death occurring very quickly. The statistics are overwhelming, with an estimated 500 million infected worldwide, and a death toll of at least 50 million.

In Tottenham cemetery, this panel written by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission ([CWGC](#)) tells us of the impact of this last global pandemic. Following the Armistice, they report that there are 50 graves of soldiers who were killed by the pandemic.



# Tottenham Cemetery

## The British Home Front during the First and Second World Wars

During the two world wars Britain became an island fortress and a base for equipping and training troops and launching land, sea and air operations. In both conflicts, the skies above the island and the seas that surround her became the scene of fierce fighting involving aircraft, submarines and warships. Britain was also the main centre for the medical care of men and women serving in the armed forces. Thousands of hospitals located across the country were used to treat service personnel who were wounded, fell victim to disease, or were injured in accidents at home or overseas.

Many of the servicemen buried in the United Kingdom were killed in action in the air while defending the home front. Others, mostly naval men, drowned in British coastal waters. However the majority were wounded or contracted disease on active service, were transported back to Britain, and subsequently died while undergoing hospital treatment or recovering in private homes.

Today over 170,000 men and women who died in the United Kingdom, while serving in the armed forces during the first and second world wars, are buried in cemeteries and churchyards throughout the country. Some burials form small war graves plots within larger cemeteries, but the majority are scattered throughout cemetery grounds. In all, there are Commonwealth



war graves in almost 12,500 different locations throughout the United Kingdom.

## Tottenham Cemetery

During the First World War, London was the site of more than 200 hospitals that cared for soldiers, sailors and airmen with every sort of medical condition. In 1915 the Edmonton Union Infirmary, a hospital located less than a mile from this cemetery, became Edmonton Military Hospital and subsequently grew to a capacity of close to 2,000 beds for sick and wounded

servicemen. As one of London's 'Central' military hospitals Edmonton received casualties directly from the battlefields of France and Belgium via hospital ships and trains, and cared for military personnel until 1920 when it returned to civilian use. North Middlesex Hospital, London hospitals used designated areas in local cemeteries for military interments, unless family members requested that their loved one be buried elsewhere. The 291 servicemen and women of the First World War buried and commemorated in Tottenham Cemetery, many of whom were natives of north London. Most of the war graves are in a

## Commonwealth War Graves Commission

The Commission is responsible for the commemoration of almost 1,700,000 members of the Commonwealth forces who gave their lives in the two world wars. The graves and memorials of these men and women, who came from all parts of the Commonwealth and who were of many faiths and of none, are found around the globe in 153 countries. For more information about the Commission, our work and how to search our records online visit [www.cwgc.org](http://www.cwgc.org). Enquiries are also welcome at our offices: CWGC Head Office: Tel: +44 (0) 1628 507200. E-mail: [casualty.enq@cwgc.org](mailto:casualty.enq@cwgc.org). CWGC United Kingdom Office: Tel: +44 (0) 1926 330137. E-mail: [ukoffice@cwgc.org](mailto:ukoffice@cwgc.org)

Photograph courtesy: Cllr John Bevan

We know from looking at the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) reports in Tottenham that the disease particularly affected the area from July 1918 through to the spring of 1919, with over 500 deaths. The numbers dying due to the influenza were possibly downplayed, as it was recorded that most had had a secondary infection of pneumonia. 50 were children under five and 42 children up to age 14. There were also 110 deaths recorded in the first wave of infections. A greater number than this suffered from the virus, and at one stage the epidemic was so great that schools had to close for a week with staff, as well as children, absent through illness. Two wards, accommodating 50 patients, were requisitioned at the Prince of Wales Hospital, and further accommodation for 12 patients was provided at Bruce Castle, then used as a Health Centre as well as Museum.

The Medical Officer for Tottenham was very progressive in his thinking and expressed interest in seeking inoculation against this deadly influenza. Other medical practitioners had been thinking at that time of taking blood from

survivors to help boost the immune system (there was no 'flu vaccine then). The similarities of these ideas seem to chime with the crisis today.

The Wellcome Library Collections have made the MOH reports available online and give some information about the reports and the pandemic itself. This is the link to their site:

<https://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/about-the-reports/about-the-medical-officer-of-health-reports/>

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.			
Diseases.	Cases notified.	Deaths.	Death Rate.
Measles	1169	7	.04
Diphtheria	334	35	.22
Diarrhoea	—	35	.22
Scarlet Fever	483	4	.02
Enteric Fever	7	2	.01
Whooping Cough	—	4	.02
Tuberculosis	447	163	1.06
Puerperal Fever	—	2	.01
Poliomyelitis	3	—	—
Erysipelas	76	1	.006
Ophthalmia Neonatorum	39	—	—
Cerebro-Spinal Fever	5	2	.01
Malaria	57	—	—
Dysentery	2	—	—
Encephalitis Lethargica	3	—	—
Influenza	—	110	.72

For the purpose of controlling the spread of Infectious Diseases, especially in congested working class areas and in the light of present

Detail from the 1920 MOH Report for Tottenham

The pandemic in 1918/19 touched everyone. In Tottenham, Miss Vernon, the Headmistress of Parkhurst Girls' School, recorded in her log book on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1918:

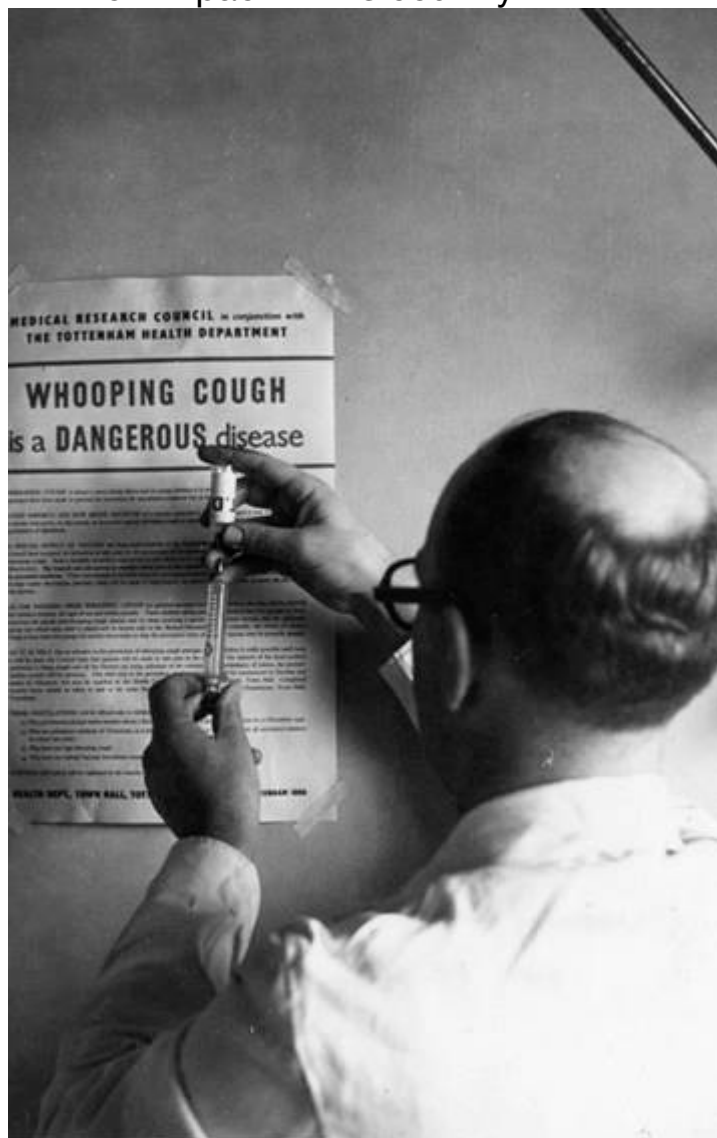
*'Cookery and laundry classes discontinued for about two months on account of the death of Miss Owen the cookery mistress.'*

The entry is cold and stark. For the girls attending the cookery centre from Parkhurst and Coleraine schools, the sudden loss of this young and popular teacher was keenly felt. Miss Owen was a victim of the second, more deadly wave, of the flu pandemic that had been sweeping across the world from the beginning of the year, carried along by the massive troop movements crossing from country to country.

There are so many occasions of serious contagious diseases affecting the community. Even something like [Scarlet fever](#) was regarded as a dangerous disease. Christine Protz recalls interviewing one local woman who was confined

in St Ann's hospital for about six months when she was six and could not even see her parents. This scenario was also enacted out in my own family, with my father and his very young sister also contracting Scarlet fever and were isolated for a while. Some of you may have heard the singer [Sir Tom Jones talking about his isolation](#) in quarantine for two years when he had TB ([tuberculosis](#)).

Many of these diseases were once commonplace, not so long ago it seems, and could be deadly. Now, with medical advances, there are more controls and medicines to help limit their impact in this country.



From the collections and © Bruce Castle Museum (Haringey Archive and Museum Service)

As we mentioned in one of our [Daily Posts early on during this lockdown](#), we are interested in knowing about and hearing how Haringey as a community has responded to the current crisis — how are people organising, helping each other and working for our communities? We know some of you are writing your thoughts down in lockdown, whilst others are recording the tremendous community effort through photographs of our streets. And others are – well, still ‘doing’, still helping. Please do get in touch either now or when the time is right, if you are thinking about recording and documenting this time as a community.

For those who have not seen it at Lordship Recreation Ground in Tottenham, we will leave you with this extraordinary photograph (below) which shares an important message for us all in this present time:



Photograph courtesy: [Tottenham Rise Facebook page](#)

With our thanks to Chris Protz.  
Until tomorrow, take care and stay well  
Best wishes from us all at Bruce Castle

**Julie Melrose**  
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**Deborah Hedgecock**  
Curator

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