

# Lessons from Eyam

Last year one of my patients who had recently returned from a trip to the UK, asked me if I knew the story of Eyam, a small village in the Peak District in Derbyshire. Our conversation is even more relevant today.

Eyam is also known as the Plague Village, for the actions that its villagers took in 1665. This is the story of how a small village stood firm, took personal risk and sacrifice, and ultimately reduced the spread and saved many more lives.

Bubonic plague was carried from London to Eyam, by fleas in a bundle of cloth destined for the tailor. Within a week the tailor's assistant was dead, soon was the tailor and his family. The village vicar and his predecessor held a meeting and proposed "protective sequestration" - in essence self isolation. Eyam went into lockdown, for 14 months. Over a third of the population died of plague.

There were many similarities to today

- The borders were shut (Level 4)
- Families stayed within themselves (bubbles)
- If a death occurred, the family had to bury their own (funeral restrictions)
- Church services and announcements were made outside (social isolation) and there was a limit on numbers (limit on gatherings)
- Money for food and medicine was left in vinegar soaked water (frequent surface sanitation)
- The money was left on 'plague stones' which marked the borders of the quarantine (contactless payment)

Eyam was the small village which stood firm.

We should take the lessons of resilience, fortitude, courage and togetherness, learned in 1666 to 2020, also with the knowledge that a small village restarted, rebuilt and is still successful more than 350 years later.

