

About British Online Archives

British Online Archives (BOA) is one of the UK's leading academic publishers and online repositories. Hosting over five million records, carefully sourced from private and public archives, such as The National Archives (UK) and British Library, BOA's specially curated primary source collections cover over 500 years of world history. They boast extensive documentation from across the globe, providing invaluable source material for students and researchers working within a wide range of scholarly disciplines, including history, politics, sociology, and international relations. Our unique digital holdings offer insights into global historical events and trends, typically through a British lens. They serve to broaden our understanding of history, and help us to make sense of contemporary social, cultural, economic, and political landscapes.

Related Collections:

BOA's primary source collections are organised thematically so as to enhance user experience and boost discoverability. Via careful reflection on our archival holdings, and in dialogue with scholars, we have grouped our collections under eleven key historical themes.

Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925, falls under the broad themes of “Medicine” and “Science and Technology”.

You can explore related collections, such as *Essays and Dissertations of the Scottish Royal Medical Society, 1751–1801*, and *Records from Bethlem Royal Hospital, 1559–1932*, by scanning the QR code.



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Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925

Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925

Charting the course and consequences of pandemics over five centuries, *Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925*, collates archival materials relating primarily to the history of the UK. The collection concentrates on four diseases that have left a significant mark upon British history: plague, cholera, smallpox, and influenza.

This collection boasts over 79,000 images, meticulously sourced from four leading UK archives: The National Archives, British Library, University College London, and The London Archives.

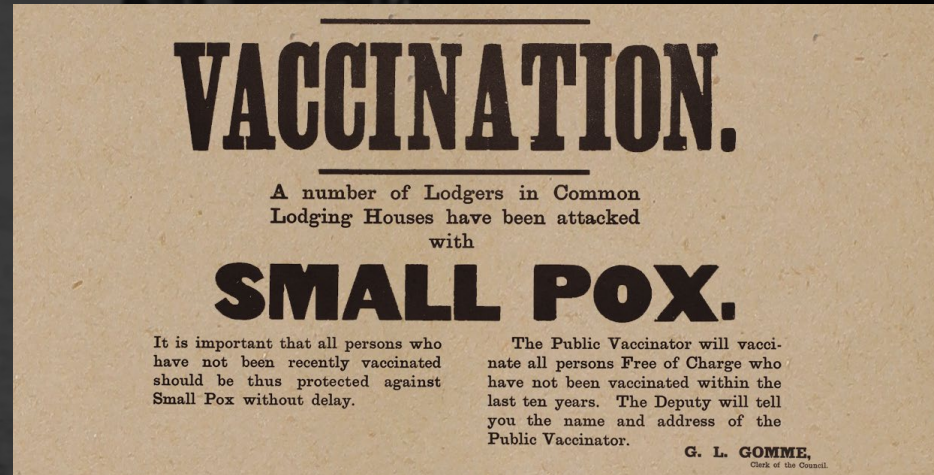
The material in this collection is rich and diverse. You will come across prayers to help safeguard populations from plague, records of attempts to transmit smallpox via infected letters, prosecutions of those failing to comply with government-imposed quarantines, registers of patented designs featuring vaccination and sanitation equipment, and sheet music to boost morale during the influenza pandemic that followed the First World War. This collection likewise contains sources drawn from the papers of some of the most influential figures in medical and social history, such as Edward Jenner, Edwin Chadwick, Florence Nightingale, and John Snow.

Given the eclectic nature of the material that it brings together, and its expansive chronological scope, *Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925*, will appeal to students, educators, and researchers working within a variety of scholarly fields, from the history of science and the history of medicine, to cultural and social history.

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This example of what today we would call pandemic planning is just one of the remarkable documents contained in British Online Archives' new collection, Pandemics, Society, and Public Health, 1517–1925. This focuses on diseases that have had a significant impact on British society.

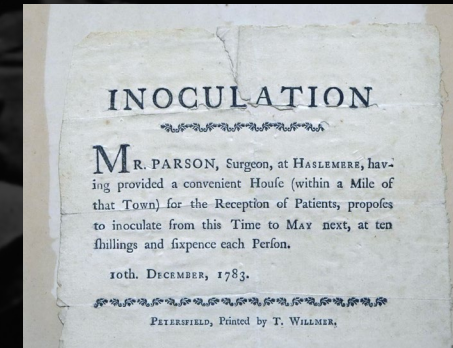
Dr Mark Honigsbaum, City, University of London



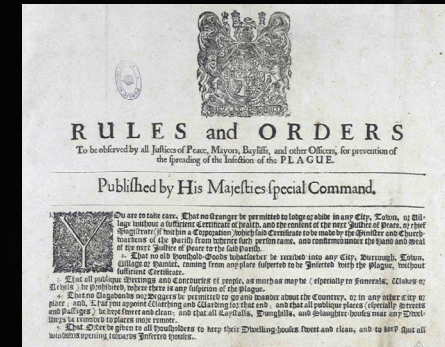
This unique collection has been sourced from multiple archives, enabling students and researchers to access and examine a wide-range of documentation relating to pandemics and their repercussions. It is an extensive and convenient resource for the study of significant eras and themes in British history.



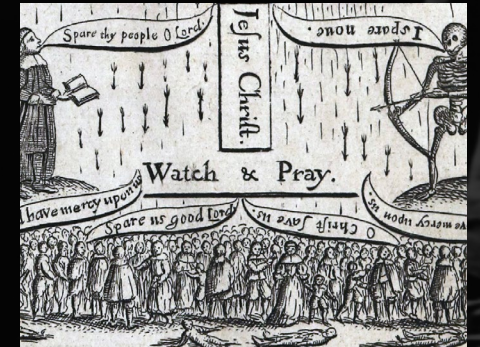
Owing to the complexity and sensitivity of this material, academics, archivists, and museum professionals were consulted throughout the curatorial process.



Key themes include economics and disease, control measures, international relations, medicine and vaccination, and public responses.



The collection is accompanied by contextual essays written by archivists and scholars. These essays describe the nature of each disease and reflect upon their impact.



The collection begins with the first state-mandated quarantine in England in 1517. It concludes with the devastating influenza pandemic that began in 1918.

A key strength of this collection is that it facilitates comparative analysis, enabling researchers to identify key parallels between previous pandemics and the recent spread of COVID-19. For example, this collection reveals efforts to provide relief for the poor during outbreaks of disease, as well as attempts by the state to impose quarantine and to encourage people to receive the smallpox vaccine. You will also come across documents resembling the “COVID pass”, such as the certificates of health introduced by the government of King Charles II in 1666, and debates as to whether it was safe to reopen public places, such as schools and theatres.

The sheer chronological scope of this collection allows students and researchers to identify and track broad historical themes. Perhaps one of the most intriguing of these is the development of the modern state, ideologically and logistically. Throughout this collection you can observe how pandemics provoked sustained thought and reflection, at all levels of society, on the very idea of the state: on its capabilities, infrastructure, powers, and, crucially, its responsibilities in terms of promoting public safety and the common good.

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Sources include: The National Archives, British Library, University College London, The London Archives