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## Reading plague in seventeenth-century London

### Abstract

Interest in plague and mortality in seventeenth-century London was fed by the weekly and yearly Bills of Mortality, and by the composite or commemorative plague bills issued in epidemic years. Some surviving examples are annotated, suggesting keen engagement with the content. This article identifies one such annotator as the city law-officer and bibliophile, Richard Smyth (1590-1675), and sets this identification in the context of Smyth's personal experience of plague, and of his book-collecting, reading and writing on the subject of plague, demography and vital statistics. Taken together Smyth's activities illuminate the important role that print and text played in shaping responses to a fearsome and recurrent feature of early modern London life.

### Introduction:

In the late summer of 1665, as plague raged in London, the printer Thomas Milbourn of Jewen Street, outside Aldersgate, brought out a single-sheet broadside entitled 'The Mourning-Cross, or, England's Lord have Mercy upon Us'. It featured a large Greek cross framed by text discussing the causes of plague and historic plagues in England and elsewhere, with 'A Necessary Prayer for this Present Time' at the foot of the sheet. In the middle of the sheet, tables present the weekly mortality figures for the plague years 1591 (sic), 1603, 1625, 1630, 1636, 1637, the yearly total for 1638, and weekly totals for 1665 up to 29 August. The figures for the week ending 29 August

1665 are given for individual parishes outside the walls. The printer has left some blank space in the column following, for the reader to continue entering weekly figures (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> [INSERT FIG 1 ABOUT HERE] As Mark Jenner and Joseph Monteyne have shown, plague broadsides were a popular print genre in seventeenth-century London. They clearly built on Londoners' familiarity with the terms and format of the weekly and yearly Bills of Mortality, but reformulated and re-presented mortality data in a striking typographical and visual design, a sophisticated mix of text, image, and numbers. Originating in or before 1625, and appearing in variant but often clearly related forms in 1636 and 1665, they survive mostly as single examples in scattered collections, along with other plague printed ephemera. This particular type, the composite bill, communicated a vision of the plagued city and its place in history, offered medical or spiritual advice, and invited readers to participate in the enumeration of the dead and the construction of a statistical narrative of the plague year.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Guildhall Library [GL], Broadside 26.13 (Wing /1837:05), reproduced on Early English Books Online, [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:cit](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:cit).

<sup>2</sup> Mark S. R. Jenner, 'Plague on a Page : Lord Have Mercy Upon Us in Early Modern London', *Seventeenth Century* 27:3 (2012), 255-286; Joseph Monteyne, *The printed image in early modern London: urban space, visual representation, and social exchange* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 73-112. See also Ernest B. Gilman, *Plague writing in early modern England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 109-117.

The printer's tacit invitation in this particular Bill was taken up by an anonymous Londoner, who transcribed onto his copy of the sheet weekly mortality totals from 29 August 1665 up to October 1666. It looks as if he added the 1665 totals all at one time, possibly from the yearly bill for 1665, which would have been published at the end of December, but those for 1666 appear to have been added week by week (Fig. 2). He also corrected the date '1591' to '1592', and endorsed the broadside with the title and opening phrase of the bill.<sup>3</sup>

This item is one of about 30 surviving commemorative bills and plague broadsheets now in Guildhall Library, London, a few dating from the early seventeenth century but most from 1636 and 1665. Several bear handwritten titles on the back in a similar hand to the annotations on this. A few also contain additional figures or other writing on the face, including another commemorative bill, 'London's Lord have mercy on us', published in July 1665. In all, at least 15 items, mostly from 1636 and 1665, bear some annotations or endorsements, most of them in what appears to be the same seventeenth-century hand. Together they suggest a reader or readers with a direct interest in the plague and some grasp of mortality statistics, access to the varied output of London presses over a period of time, and a method for storing and retrieving documents.

This article argues that the anonymous annotator of Guildhall Library's copy of 'The Mourning-Cross' and some of the other broadsides can be identified as Richard Smyth (1590-1675), retired city law-officer, a keen book-

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<sup>3</sup> GL Broadside 26.13. The sheet has been backed with plain paper but the endorsements can still be seen though not clearly read.

collector who was known to annotate works in his extensive collection. An unusual variety of evidence survives both to link Smyth to the annotated Bills and to document his encounters with plague and the literatures of plague. Though he was clearly not the only person to engage with these broadsides in this way, giving a name and back-story to at least one reader and user of the Bills of Mortality and plague broadsides extends our understanding of their reception and use by early modern Londoners.<sup>4</sup> Smyth's reading and writing about plague, across a variety of genres, complement other first-hand accounts of plague and illuminate the important role that print and text played in Londoners' experience of this 'dreaded visitation'.

### **Identifying the annotator**

Several different sources help to identify Smyth as the owner and annotator of the 1665 'Mourning-Cross' and other plague broadsides.

Handwriting offers strong supporting evidence. A number of securely-attributed autograph manuscript works of Smyth's survive, notably Cambridge University Library manuscript Mm.iv.36, 'A Catalogue of all such persons deceased as I knew in their life time', a sort of personal parish register,<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>4</sup> See James C. Robertson, 'Reckoning with London: interpreting the Bills of Mortality before John Graunt', *Urban History* 23 (1996) 325-50; Will Slauter, 'Write up your dead', *Media History* 17:1 (2011), 1-15.

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge University Library [CUL] MS Mm.iv.36, 'A Catalogue of all such persons deceased as I knew in their life time, wherein are set down the several years of Our Lord, and the dayes of the month when every one of them dyed or were buried, from the year of Our Lord M.DC.XXVIII

Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.a.5.10, a compilation of materials principally concerning the bishops of England and Wales and other ecclesiastical matters.<sup>6</sup> There are also several partial catalogues, in Smyth's own hand, of his extensive book collection.<sup>7</sup> Smyth has no single consistent handwriting, using a variety of running and more stylised hands including imitations of italic and black letter type in his compilations and catalogues, and a formal signature, but the handwriting on the broadsides is a good match for his common style, including his capital letters (Fig. 3).<sup>8</sup> [INSERT FIGS 2 AND 3 TOGETHER ABOUT HERE]

Equally important is the evidence for his ownership of Bills of Mortality and plague bills. Smyth was a bibliophile and collector of note. The auction sale of his library in 1682, following the death of his daughter and executrix Martha

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successively'; edited and printed (from a later copy, British Library [BL] Sloane MS 886) by H. Ellis, ed., as *The Obituary of Richard Smyth, Secondary of the Poultry Compter, London*, Camden Society xlv (1849). Citations are to the printed edition, hereafter *Obituary*.

<sup>6</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC, MS V.a.5.10, 'Papers of Richard Smith [manuscript], ca. 1633-ca. 1670.'

<sup>7</sup> BL Add. MS 21096, Harley MS 6207, Sloane MSS 771, 1071; Bodleian Library [Bodl.] MS Rawlinson D 1377.

<sup>8</sup> For the variety of hands employed see for example Folger MS V.a.5.10 part 2 and BL Add. MS 21096. For his signature in the 1620s and 1630s see London Metropolitan Archives [LMA], P69/OLA2/B/001/MS04415/001 (St Olave Old Jewry vestry minutes), ff. 21v et seqq.

Hacker,<sup>9</sup> comprised over 8,000 lots, advertised by the auctioneer Richard Chiswell as ‘perhaps the best and largest collection of that kind that is in any private library in this Nation’.<sup>10</sup> More than half the books were in Latin, and in addition to books in English there was also a large quantity of tracts, booklets, and pamphlets, sold in bundles. Smyth’s scholarly interests were wide-ranging and eclectic, focusing on history, especially church history and the polemics of the civil war period, theology, and bibliography, with a noteworthy collection of incunabula and early printed works. The collection included a large number of medical works, in both Latin and English, and a few on natural history and science. An interest in demography is indicated by Smyth’s ownership of at least one copy of John Graunt’s *Natural and Political*

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<sup>9</sup> Will of Richard Smyth: The National Archives [TNA] PROB 11/347 ff. 289v-290v; will of Martha Hacker: TNA PROB 11/367 ff. 192r-193r.

<sup>10</sup> *Bibliotheca Smithiana sive, Catalogus librorum ... D. Richardus Smith, Londinensis* (London, printed by Richard Chiswell, 1682: Wing S4151) [hereafter *Bibl. Smith*. The pagination is inconsistent], preface. See E. G. Duff, ‘The library of Richard Smyth’, *The Library* 8 (1907), 113-33; T. A. Birrell, ‘Books and buyers in seventeenth-century English auction sales’, in Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote, eds., *Under the hammer: book auctions since the seventeenth century* (New Castle, DE, and London: Oak Knoll and British Library, 2001), pp. 51-64. Information on purchasers of Smyth’s books is from the auctioneer’s record copy of the catalogue, now in a private collection, available on microfilm as BL Mic.A.1343. I am very grateful to Professor Alan Nelson for kindly giving me a copy of his database of the catalogue entries and purchasers’ details.

*Observations on the Bills of Mortality*,<sup>11</sup> and by his praise of Graunt, 'my old acquaintance', as 'an understanding man, of quick wit and a pretty scholar'.<sup>12</sup> Although the sale catalogue contained a number of works added by the auctioneer, some published after Smyth's death in 1675, it is likely that the great majority of the books listed had belonged to Smyth.

The sale catalogue lists three lots of particular relevance in the section 'Bundles of sticht books in quarto, English'. The first, item 140, comprised '*Jo. Graunt, Natural and Political Observations on Bills of Mortality, Lond. Act for preventing of Fires in London, 1668. J. Bells Bills of Mortality for 18 years, with two more Treatises concerning London*'.<sup>13</sup> The first item is presumably an unbound copy of Graunt, though the book is elsewhere described as octavo.<sup>14</sup> The third must be John Bell's *London's Remembrancer, or, A true accompt of every particular weeks christnings and mortality in all the years of pestilence within the cognizance of the bills of mortality, being xviii years*.<sup>15</sup> Bell's work,

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<sup>11</sup> *Catalogus impressorum librorum Bibliothecæ Bodlejanæ in Academia Oxoniensi. Cura & operâ Thomæ Hyde è Coll. Reginae Oxon. Protobibliothecarii* (Oxford: E theatro Sheldoniano, 1674): BL copy C.21.e.2., with marginal annotation on p. 302 by Smyth of his ownership of the 1662 edition.

<sup>12</sup> *Obituary*, p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Bundles of sticht books in quarto, English', no. 140, p. 383.

<sup>14</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, 'English books in octavo', no. 371, p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> London: Printed and are to be sold by E. Cotes, Printer to the Company of Parish Clerks: Wing B1800.



published before the end of October 1665, focuses on the presentation of mortality figures for this and earlier plague years, in order to correct ‘the many and gross mistakes which have been imposed upon the world, by divers ignorant Scriblers’.<sup>16</sup> This lot was bought for 2s. 4d. by a Mr Rawlett, who also bought other lots, mostly to do with church doctrine.<sup>17</sup>

Two more lots in Smyth’s sale, also in the section ‘Bundles of stitcht books in quarto, English’, are no. 231, described as a ‘Bundle of Weekly Bills of Mortality for *London*, beginning part of the year 1663, going on in compleat years to 1670 inclusive, besides part 1668, 1669, with a parcel of old Bills of Mortality, &c in King *Charles* the First’s time’, and no. 232, a ‘Bundle of Weekly Bills of Mortality for *London*, for ten years compleat, beginning 1670,

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<sup>16</sup> Bell, *Remembrancer*, Preface, referring in particular to *Reflections on the weekly bills of mortality for the cities of London and Westminster, and the places adjacent but more especially, so far as it relates to the plague and other most mortal diseases that we English-men are most subject to, and should be most careful against in this our age* (London: Printed for Samuel Speed, 1665: Wing G1603). *Reflections* is attributed by EEBO to Graunt, probably wrongly.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Mr Rawlett’ could have been the Anglican clergyman John Rawlet (1642-86), though if so it seems likely that he was represented at the sale by an agent: Caroline L. Leachman, ‘Rawlet, John (*bap.* 1642, *d.* 1686)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn., May 2007 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23183>, accessed 16 Aug 2016].

and continues to 1680 Inclusive, with part of the year 1681'.<sup>18</sup> While one obvious challenge to the proposition that these items had belonged to Smyth is that the second 'Bundle' continues well after the date of his death in 1675, the strong evidence, discussed below, for his ownership suggests perhaps that Martha Hacker simply continued to subscribe to and preserve the weekly Bills up to her own death in 1681, after which the whole collection including these works and any others she may have added to her father's was sold.<sup>19</sup> Both lots were bought by the collector Narcissus Luttrell, for 6s. 2d. and 2s. 6d. respectively, suggesting that lot 231 was substantially larger or more interesting than lot 232.<sup>20</sup>

The auction catalogue descriptions of these two lots fit quite well with items now in Guildhall Library, the two 'Bundles' with GL A.1.5.96 and 97, quarto books of Bills of Mortality, bound in the nineteenth century after their acquisition by the Library, and the 'parcel of old Bills of Mortality, &c in King Charles the First's time' with the broadsides under discussion. The exact date of their accession by the Library has not yet been traced. The first, GL A.1.5.96, now with the spine title *London's Remembrancer. Bills of Mortality 1,*

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<sup>18</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Bundles of sticht books in quarto, English', nos. 231-2, p. 390.

<sup>19</sup> TNA PROB 11/367, ff. 192r-193r.

<sup>20</sup> BL Mic.A.1343. Cf. Henry Horwitz, 'Luttrell, Narcissus (1657–1732)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17226>, accessed 13 March 2017]. Some of the manuscripts Luttrell bought at this sale are now in the Codrington Library of All Souls' College, Oxford (Duff, 'The library of Richard Smyth', p. 132), but there is no trace there of these items.

1661-1671, comprises in sequence a copy of Bell's *London's Remembrancer*; an incomplete set of original yearly and weekly bills dating from 1661 to 1664; *London's Dreadful Visitation* (1666), a volume of the weekly bills for 1665, printed for the Parish Clerks' Company;<sup>21</sup> an original yearly bill for 1665; original weekly and yearly bills for 1666-8; yearly bills for 1669 and 1670; and weekly and yearly bills for 1671. Most of the original bills were once spiked or threaded; some show signs of having been folded in three. They have been carefully flattened and mended, probably by the nineteenth-century binder, and the whole lightly cropped. The second volume, GL A.1.5.97, now entitled *London's Remembrancer. Bills of Mortality 2, 1671-80*, contains a complete sequence of original weekly and yearly bills from 1671 to 1680. The weekly bills were once spiked, as were some but not all of the yearly bills.

While it seems unlikely that the copy of Bell's *Remembrancer* in GL A.1.5.96 was Smyth's (since his copy was sold separately from the bundles of bills), some of the content of the two bound volumes is firmly linked to him. Crucially, in GL A.1.5.96, on the weekly bill for Week 24, 24-31 May 1664, there is a manuscript note 'May 25 this week Died my deare wife. Buried S

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<sup>21</sup> *London's dreadful visitation, or, A collection of all the bills of mortality for this present year beginning the 20th of December, 1664, and ending the 19th of December following: as also the general or whole years bill: according to the report made to the King's Most Excellent Majesty by the Company of Parish-Clerks of London* (London: Printed and are to be sold by E. Cotes, 1666: Wing G1593A).

Giles Cripplegate May 28',<sup>22</sup> which exactly corresponds with the information on his wife's death and burial in Smyth's 'Catalogue of all such persons deceased'.<sup>23</sup> In the same volume, and in the same hand, on the weekly bill for Week 36, 21-28 August 1666, there is a note of the fire's beginning and end.<sup>24</sup> In GL A.1.5.97, on the weekly bill for Week 17, 7-15 April 1673, there is a note in the same hand against the report of 27 soldiers drowned at St Margaret Westminster.<sup>25</sup> Also, bound into GL A.1.5.97, between the last weekly bill for 1676 and the yearly bill for the same, is a folded paper (now numbered ff. 258-9), slightly smaller than the bills, with a handwritten discussion of the bills' cause-of-death category 'overlaid', signed on f. 258r with the initials R.S. (Fig 4). [INSERT FIG 4 ABOUT HERE] Folios 258v and 259r contain extracts from ecclesiastical constitutions and rituals, in Latin, on the same subject.<sup>26</sup> The hand is consonant with Richard Smyth's attested autograph writings. He quite often added his initials to sections of his writing,<sup>27</sup> and at least three of the

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<sup>22</sup> GL A.1.5.96, f. 62 I am particularly grateful to Ann Martin of Guildhall Library for drawing my attention to this annotation.

<sup>23</sup> *Obituary*, p. 60; LMA P69/GIS/A/002/MS06419/007 (Register of St Giles Cripplegate, 1663-7).

<sup>24</sup> GL A.1.5.96, f. 181.

<sup>25</sup> GL A.1.5.97, f. 69v.

<sup>26</sup> I am again particularly grateful to Ann Martin of Guildhall Library for drawing my attention to this.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Folger MS V.a.5.10: see the online description at <http://titania.folger.edu/Findingaids/dfosmithr.xml>; BL Sloane MS 790.

sources quoted on ff. 258v-259r were in the sale catalogue of his library.<sup>28</sup>

The style of excerpting and quoting from authorities is very characteristic of him: Richard Chiswell, in his preface to the sale catalogue, said that Smyth 'entred memorable and very useful remarks upon very many of the Books under his own hand', and numerous items in the catalogue itself are described as bearing 'observations' or annotations by Smyth.<sup>29</sup>

The particular topic of discussion on these folios, that the diagnosis 'overlaid' could conceal infanticide or neglect, and that such deaths should be properly investigated by civil or ecclesiastical authorities, does not chime with any other known concern of Smyth's, nor is it an issue raised in Graunt's *Observations*, but these notes might be the only survivor of a much larger amount of writing on the subject of health or mortality. Even if not, they certainly show Smyth's ability to read and mark the data in the bills, extrapolate, and seek correlations in other sources, in a manner similar to Graunt but more focused on the social rather than demographic implications of his observations.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Rituale Ciuitatis Patauina edito Patauii 1597 4o' is *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Theological books in quarto', no. 493, p. 16; 'Rituale Romano Pauli 5. P. iussa edito Imp. Antuerp 162[5]' is *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Theological books in quarto', no. 492, p. 16; 'Constitutiones Ecclesia Veronensis in Italia. Veronae 1589 4o per Episcopum Veronensem' is *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Theological books in quarto', no. 127, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, preface, and passim. See for example Folger MS V.a.5.10, especially parts 2, 6, and 7.

The 'parcel of old Bills of Mortality, &c in King *Charles* the First's time', part of lot 231 in 'Bundles of stitcht books in quarto, English' in Smyth's sale, is harder to identify with the same certainty, because the description is vague, but there is the strong associational link with the Guildhall Library volumes of Bills, and at least three, and probably as many as 13, of the single-sheet broadsides - yearly bills, composite bills, and other plague material, dating from 1603 to 1665 – can plausibly be identified as once belonging to Smyth. The 1665 'Mourning-Cross',<sup>30</sup> with which this paper began, is one; so too is a copy of the 1636 'Red Crosse, or England Lord haue mercy on us', annotated not only with mortality figures but also in the margin with notes of other historic plagues.<sup>31</sup> The handwriting on the face of these broadsheets is very like Smyth's, and the annotations on the 'Red Crosse' are in his style. Both are endorsed with writing at least similar to Smyth's, that appears to reiterate the printed title, but the endorsements are now hard to read because the sheets have been backed with plain paper. Eleven other plague broadsides appear to have been endorsed in a similar way.<sup>32</sup> The only endorsement fully legible is an unbacked sheet, printed on both sides, 'Advice for the poor by way of Cure and Caution .... By T. Cocke, 1665'.<sup>33</sup> The hand and style of endorsement closely resemble Smyth's endorsements of papers now among the Sloane manuscripts at the British Library.<sup>34</sup> Only one item (37.1), a

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<sup>30</sup> GL Broadside 26.13.

<sup>31</sup> GL Broadside 37.16.

<sup>32</sup> GL Broadside 28.48, 37.1, 3, 9, 15, 17-23.

<sup>33</sup> GL Broadside 37.23.

<sup>34</sup> BL Sloane MS 1710, item 36.

standard yearly bill for 1602-3, dates from before 'King *Charles* the First's time'.

Guildhall Library also holds several other broadsides and single-sheet mortality bills, including the much-reproduced 'London's Lord have mercy on us' of 1665,<sup>35</sup> which are either not annotated or endorsed at all, or annotated or endorsed in a hand that is not like Smyth's. As before, the details of accession to Guildhall Library of these items are unclear, but it looks as if bills and broadsides from several different sources have now been collected and catalogued together, and that their present arrangement does not relate closely to their provenance. While it cannot be proved beyond doubt that some of the plague broadsides now in Guildhall Library were owned and annotated by Richard Smyth, the probability is strong, and adds an important dimension to a wider exploration of his experience of plague and interest in demographic statistics.

### **Richard Smyth's experience of plague in seventeenth-century London**

Richard Smyth was, as mentioned above, a bibliophile and book-collector of note. In 1665 he was already 75, and had retired ten years earlier from a successful and apparently remunerative career as a law-officer of the City of London, culminating in the post of Secondary of the Poultry Compter from 1644 to 1655. After his retirement he was free to pursue his book-collecting, which he had begun much earlier, and he built up a large and varied library,

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<sup>35</sup> GL Broadside 33.25; see Jenner, 'Plague on a Page'. Other copies of the same broadside are available on EEBO.

and a wide acquaintance among London's booksellers and printers.<sup>36</sup> As well as collecting books, he was at this time working on various compilations and transcriptions, making much use of books in his library. His manuscript account of English bishops was largely completed in 1658-9 and then updated in the early 1660s.<sup>37</sup> Most of the fragmentary library catalogues seem to have been compiled in the 1660s.<sup>38</sup> It also seems likely that his manuscript 'Catalogue of all such persons deceased' was written up, presumably from earlier notes, in about 1663, though he continued to add to it until a few weeks before his death in March 1675.<sup>39</sup> His general approach reveals him to be a serious scholar with an interest in organising and systematising information of various kinds, earnest rather than original, but with a fascination for unusual phenomena (he made a compilation of 'Wonders of the world' which covered topics from the holy house of Loreto to giants and pigmies) and a taste for theological disputation.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Duff, 'The library of Richard Smyth'.

<sup>37</sup> Folger MS V.a.5.10.

<sup>38</sup> BL Add. MS 21096, Harley MS 6207, Sloane MSS 771, 1071

<sup>39</sup> CUL MS Mm.iv.36. Most of the text was copied out, if not all at one time, then certainly in large batches with little change in the handwriting up to about April 1663 (ff. 13v-14r); thereafter entries were written up on numerous occasions.

<sup>40</sup> See Folger MS V.a.5.10 parts 5 and 6; BL Sloane MS 388 (a scribal copy of the *Wonders of the World*); *A letter from Mr. Richard Smith to Dr. Henry Hammond, concerning the sence of that article in the creed, He descended into hell, together with Dr. Hammond's answer* (London, Printed for Richard



In the early 1650s he moved from Old Jewry near Guildhall, where he had lived since the 1620s and brought up his family, to Little Moorfields in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate outside the city wall. He occupied a house of seven hearths in or near White's Alley,<sup>41</sup> described in the early eighteenth century as 'a good handsome open Place, well built; some of the Houses having Gardens unto them'.<sup>42</sup> His wife of nearly 40 years died in 1664; thereafter his household ('our family') may have included his late wife's sister-in-law Mrs Mary Edney and also his widowed daughter Mrs Martha Hacker and her two daughters, and probably one or more servants.<sup>43</sup>

### ***His experience of plague***

As a long-term resident of seventeenth-century London, Smyth encountered several episodes of plague.<sup>44</sup> He arrived in the capital in 1609 or 1610, just as an extended period of raised plague mortality was ending. He lived through the epidemics of 1625 and 1636 in Old Jewry, and that of 1665

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Chiswell, 1684: Wing S4154).

<sup>41</sup> A. Wareham, M. Davies, C. Ferguson, V. Harding, and E. Parkinson, eds. *The London and Middlesex Hearth Tax Returns* (British Record Society, Hearth Tax Series vol. IX, 2014), vol. 1, p. 1282 no. 925.

<sup>42</sup> John Strype, *A survey of the cities of London and Westminster*, Book 3, chapter 5, p. 86 (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype> ).

<sup>43</sup> *Obituary*, pp. 60, 83, 103; Strype, *Survey*, as above; will of Richard Smyth: TNA PROB 11/347, ff. 289v-290v.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Slack, *The impact of plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 1985), Fig 6.1, p. 146.

in St Giles Cripplegate. Nothing is known directly of his experience of 1625, though St Olave Old Jewry suffered 26 plague deaths out of a total of 44 that year. Sixteen out of some 50 rateable households in this comparatively small parish (2.5a; 1 Ha) lost one or more members. Smyth would have seen crosses on several doors in his street, and perhaps noted that on the whole it was the more modest households in the parish that were affected;<sup>45</sup> some of his wealthier neighbours may well have left London along with other 'chief inhabitants' of the city.<sup>46</sup> No plague deaths were reported in the parish in 1636, overall a much milder epidemic, especially in the city centre, than either 1625 or 1665.<sup>47</sup> The 1640s saw several years of raised plague mortality, though not a full-blown epidemic, and Smyth recorded one or two deaths from plague in 1641, 1644, 1645, and 1646, including one in Old Jewry in May 1644, in his 'Catalogue'. In 1647, he recorded six plague deaths, two of them outside the city but four closer to home.<sup>48</sup>

1665 was a different matter, both for Smyth and for London. Overall, 68,596 of the 97,306 deaths recorded in the Bills of Mortality between 21 December 1664 and 19 December 1665 were attributed to plague. St Giles

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<sup>45</sup> Bell, *London's Remembrancer*, [unpaginated], yearly bill for 1625; LMA P69/OLA2/A/001/MS04399, P69/OLA2/A/002/MS04400 (registers of St Olave Old Jewry). Most plague deaths occurred in households rated to contribute the minimum 1s. 7d. to the scavenger's wages in 1623: LMA P69/OLA2/B/001/MS04415/001 (Vestry minutes of St Olave Old Jewry), f. 9.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Slack, *Impact*, pp. 166-9.

<sup>47</sup> Bell, *London's Remembrancer*, [unpaginated], yearly bill for 1636.

<sup>48</sup> Slack, *Impact*, p. 146; *Obituary*, pp. 19, 21-5.

Cripplegate, a large suburban parish of over 250a (c. 100 Ha), was very hard hit by the epidemic, with one of the worst mortality rates per household as well as huge numbers overall. The parish's population on the eve of the plague could have been 25,000, and in normal years it buried some 1,100 people; the yearly Bill for 1665 records 8,069 deaths, of which 4,838 (60 per cent) were attributed to plague.<sup>49</sup> Deaths attributed to fever, spotted fever, dropsy, and other diseases were also far above normal.<sup>50</sup> The first plague deaths in the parish occurred in early June, nearly a month after the first plague deaths in the northwestern parishes, but they rose rapidly in July and throughout August. The worst week for plague deaths was 22-29 August, when 842 people died,

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<sup>49</sup> Justin A. I. Champion, *London's Dreaded Visitation. The social geography of the Great Plague in 1665* (Historical Geography Research Series 31, 1995), p. 106. A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy Moote, *The Great Plague. The story of London's most deadly year* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 298-9, count 7,936 deaths with 5,604 attributed to plague in the parish register for the calendar year (1 January-31 December) 1665.

<sup>50</sup> Moote and Moote, *Great Plague*, pp. 134-5. Whether these were misattributed plague deaths, or evidence of concurrent but distinct epidemics, is yet to be determined. For varying views on the identity of early modern plague, see Slack, *Impact*, pp. 64-5; Graham Twigg, 'Plague in London: spatial and temporal aspects of mortality', in *Epidemic disease in London*, ed. Justin A. I. Champion (London, Centre for Metropolitan History, 1993), pp. 1-17; Samuel K. Cohn, jr., *Cultures of Plague. Medical thinking at the end of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 2010), especially chapter 2, pp. 39-76; Twigg, *Bubonic plague, a much misunderstood disease* (Ascot: Derwent Press, 2013).

602 of them of plague. Deaths declined through September and continued to fall in October, though weekly plague deaths only came down to single figures in late November.<sup>51</sup>

The epidemic marked the local environment. In January 1666 the parish vestry noted that the huge local mortality had overwhelmed their burial spaces, and began to look for ground for a new churchyard.<sup>52</sup> Residents of the parish in 1665 must also have been conscious of the proximity of the City's Pesthouse to the north of Old Street, and of the overflow of plague burials from the city. Defoe – not always a reliable guide – instances 'the great pit in Finsbury Fields', and lists plague burial sites or grounds near Goswell Street, at Moorfields, off Bishopsgate Street, and in Shoreditch.<sup>53</sup> The New Churchyard, on the north-east side of Moorfields, accommodated a large number of burials in 1665, leading to complaints of 'noisome stenches arising from the great number of dead' and by September to the commissioning of a new burial ground in Bunhill Fields only slightly further away.<sup>54</sup>

Although his own household was not touched by the plague, the epidemic had a major impact on Smyth's circle of family and acquaintance. His otherwise rather dry 'Catalogue of all such persons deceased' conveys a

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<sup>51</sup> Figures from *London's Dreadful Visitation* (1666).

<sup>52</sup> LMA P69/GIS/B/001/06048/001 (St Giles Cripplegate vestry minutes), f. 21v.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), ed. Paula R.

Backscheider (New York: Norton, 1992), pp. 142-3, 180-1. Not all Defoe's plague burial sites can be independently verified.

<sup>54</sup> LMA COL/CA/01/01/074 (Repertory of the Court of Aldermen 70, 3 Nov 1664 - 24 Oct 1665), ff. 153v, 155, 156.

sense of the overwhelming presence and relentless course of epidemic mortality. In the early 1660s he was recording some 30-40 deaths a year in the 'Catalogue'; in 1665 this swelled to 169, including 104 deaths from plague, and two more suspected but not reported. Smyth recorded the deaths of acquaintances across the city, especially people associated with the book trade and the law, but many were close at hand. The first plague death in his 'Catalogue' is that of his late wife's niece Elizabeth Houlker, at her sister Mary Harby's in Whitecross Street in Cripplegate parish, on 4 July; the second (suspected but not returned as a plague death) was the parish sexton, on 5 July. Two weeks later, on 16 July, he noted the deaths from plague of Mary Harby's child and her nurse. Mary's husband William Harby died of plague on 9 August, but Mary herself survived. Several households Smyth knew well were hit. His friend Mrs Muschamp in Old Street lost a son, a daughter, and a maidservant. His former maidservant Nell Hutchins died of plague, along with her mother and stepfather, in their house in nearby Tenter Alley; Nell's sister died in the Pesthouse. Martha Hacker's tenant and his wife in White's Alley died. There were deaths in four of Smyth's neighbours' houses; another neighbour, Mr Ward, lost his brother and his five children. Smyth's pew-fellow Mrs Durant died. The parish lost its sexton, three of the churchwardens, and the parish clerk's wife. In all, at least 35 of the plague deaths Smyth reports were in his own parish.<sup>55</sup> His 'Catalogue' also casts some light on the vagaries of plague diagnosis and statistics: he reports two deaths 'suspected to have died of the sickness, but not returned', and two more, Mrs Muschamp's

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<sup>55</sup> *Obituary*, pp. 63-71; LMA P69/GIS/B/015/MS06047/001 (churchwardens' accounts, St Giles Cripplegate), f. 169.

daughter and the infant Martha Harby, as plague, though the parish register notes them as ‘spotted fever’ and ‘convulsions’ respectively.<sup>56</sup>

***His collection of other writings on plague: translations, tracts, ownership of remedy collections***

Perhaps not surprisingly for a scholar and bibliophile, Smyth’s personal experience of plague was framed by text and print. He lived it, but he also seems to have read quite extensively about it, drawing on an abundance of publications on health, disease, and medicine.<sup>57</sup> The sale catalogue of his library contains a large number of plague-related items apart from Graunt, Bell, and the Bills of Mortality discussed above. Among English works it lists Simon Kellway’s *Defensative against the plague* (1593), Thomas Thayre’s *Treatise of the pestilence* (1603), James Balmford’s *Dialogue concerning the plagues infection* (1603), James Manning’s *New book ... of the Pestilence* (1604), and Thomas Cogan’s *Haven of Health, with a Preservation from the Pestilence*

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<sup>56</sup> *Obituary*, p. 64; LMA P69/GIS/A/002/MS06419/007 (Burial register, St Giles Cripplegate, 1663-7), 16 July, 9 August 1665.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Slack, ‘Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England’, in *Health, medicine and mortality in the sixteenth century*, ed. Charles Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 237-73, at p. 241; Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626-1660* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 264-73, 489.

(1605).<sup>58</sup> The catalogue also lists ‘Ten several treatises of the plague’, and various sermons and prayers in time of plague.<sup>59</sup> While it not certain that Smyth himself owned these works, he did own copies of the popular remedy collection *A rich storehouse, or treasure for the diseased* by ‘A.T., Practitioner in phisicke and chirurgerie’ (London, 1631),<sup>60</sup> and John Woodall’s *The surgeon’s mate* (London, 1639),<sup>61</sup> both of which contain sections or treatises on plague. Smyth annotated his copy of *A rich storehouse*, but which parts and with what purpose we do not know.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps significantly, he does not seem to have owned more modern works on plague by English Paracelsian or Helmontian medical writers such as George Thomson.

Smyth also had an extensive collection of works in Latin, mostly from continental presses. There is a close correlation between Smyth’s own manuscript list of his Latin medical books in folio format and that in the printed sale catalogue, and it seems very likely that most of the Latin medical works in other formats listed in the sale catalogue were actually in his library as

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<sup>58</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Vols. of Tracts English, 4o’, no. 87, p. 362, no. 200, p. 369; ‘English books in Quarto’, no. 157, p. 184.

<sup>59</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Bundles of sticht books, 4o’, no. 86, p. 379, no. 212, p. 389; ‘Vols. of Tracts English, 4o’, no. 87, p. 362; ‘English books in Octavo’, no. 223, p. 198.

<sup>60</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘English books in Quarto’, no. 512, p. 192.

<sup>61</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘English books in Folio’, no. 414, p. 281; Bodl. MS Rawlinson 1377, f. 53.

<sup>62</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘English books in Quarto’, no. 512, p. 192.

well.<sup>63</sup> ‘Libri Medici’, the section of the sale catalogue covering medical works in Latin, includes works on plague by Bayre or Bairo (1578), Cardano (1564), Diemerbroeck (1665), Donzellini (1606), Duchesne or Quercetanus (1608), Fumanelli (1557), Goclenius (1607), Ingrassia (1606), Kircher (1659), Laurentius (1649), Lyonnet (1639), Minderer (1616), Oddo degli Oddi (1570), Raze (al-Razi) (1555), Settala (1622), Silvaticus (1605), Valesius (1656), and Zovello (1557).<sup>64</sup> There may well be other works on plague not immediately identifiable by title.<sup>65</sup> He owned at least two copies of the College of Physicians’ *Pharmacopoeia Londinensis*,<sup>66</sup> and a copy of Leonhardt Fuchs, *De Medendis Morbis* (Basel, 1558).<sup>67</sup> The list is eclectic rather than

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<sup>63</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Libri Medici in folio’, pp. 181-2, lists 64 works, of which 54 are listed on ff. 32v-33r of BL Sloane MS 771, a holograph part-catalogue of Smyth’s books in folio.

<sup>64</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Libri Medici’, pp. 181-96. We can only be certain of Smyth’s ownership of two of these, Fumanelli’s *Opera Medica varia, ut de Balneis, de Peste, etc.* (Zurich, 1557) and Cardano’s *Aphorisms of Hippocrates* ‘together with a work of the same on plague’ (Basel, 1564): *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Libri Medici in Folio’, nos. 20, 27, p. 181; BL Sloane MS 771, ff. 32v-33r, but as noted above it is likely he owned most of them. .

<sup>65</sup> Some but not all the Latin works are identifiable in the Universal Short Title Catalogue and/or the catalogues of the British Library and the Bodleian and Oxford libraries.

<sup>66</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Libri Medici in Folio’, nos. 44, 45, p. 182.

<sup>67</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, ‘Libri Medici in Octavo’, no. 309, p. 190, of which BL Sloane MS 788 is a copy in Richard Smyth’s hand.



comprehensive, and the range of presses and printers could suggest a collector's interest in imprints rather than significant attention to content, though, as will be seen, Smyth did peruse and draw excerpts from several older works. There is little reflection of the outpouring of Italian publications of the 1570s identified by Cohn, which a keen student of plague might have wanted to have;<sup>68</sup> the important works of Donzellini and Ingrassia are represented in a small-format book published in Frankfurt in 1606.<sup>69</sup> Kircher's *Scrutinium Physico-Medicum Contagiosae Luis, quae dicitur Pestis* (1659) and Diemerbroeck's four-volume *Tractatus de Peste* (1665) may suggest a more current interest.<sup>70</sup> So too may Nathaniel Hodges' *Loimologia* (1672), a substantial work combining a brief first-hand medical account of the 1665 plague in London (including a re-set version of the yearly Bill of Mortality) with an extensive account of plague's aetiology, symptoms, and manifestations, and a number of precautions and remedies.<sup>71</sup> We know little about the sources for most of Smyth's collection, though there was clearly a lively trade

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<sup>68</sup> Cohn, *Cultures of Plague*, especially Chapter 1.

<sup>69</sup> 'Hier. Donzellini, Jo.Phil. Ingrassiae, Caes. Riniij etc., *Commentarii de Peste, Franc[ofortij] 1606*': *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Libri Medici in Duodecimo', no. 524, p. 94. This seems likely to be a variant of the *Synopsis commentariorum de peste* covering these authors published by Joachim Camerarius in 1583 and 1597: see BL and Bodleian Library catalogues under this title.

<sup>70</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Libri Medici in Quarto', no. 52, p. 184.

<sup>71</sup> *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Libri Medici in Octavo', no. 341, p. 190.

in second-hand and antiquarian books in seventeenth-century London, and the auction of his collection was well attended.<sup>72</sup>

But a direct interest in plague and plague writings is shown by his transcription or translation of a handful of plague treatises and works. In October 1665, he translated from Latin into English two sermons of the fifteenth-century scholastic theologian Gabriel Biel (probably from his own copy of an early sixteenth-century printed edition) on the question whether it was lawful, morally or otherwise, to flee the plague.<sup>73</sup> Also in October 1665 he transcribed a tract by the Dutch theologian Andrew (André) Rivet, written in 1636, various extracts from different sources on the plague, and a tract by Ludovicus Berus printed in Basel in 1551, all largely on the moral response to plague and the question of flight.<sup>74</sup> At some date, probably also in 1665, he

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<sup>72</sup> Robin Myers, Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote, eds., *Under the Hammer: Book Auctions since the Seventeenth Century* (New Castle, DE, and London: Oak Knoll and British Library, 2001); Duff, 'The library of Richard Smith'; BL Mic.A.1343 (copy of *Bibl. Smith.*, annotated with purchasers and prices). Jane Toms is making a study of Smyth's medical books and their purchasers.

<sup>73</sup> BL Sloane MS 790; *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Theologici & Hist. Ecclesiast. in Quarto', no. 55, p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> BL Sloane MS 790, 791. Several works by Rivet are in Smyth's sale catalogue: *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Theologici & Hist. Ecclesiast. in Quarto', nos. 472-8, p. 16; *ibid.*, 'Theologici, &c., in Octavo', nos. 559-567, p. 29.

copied out by hand translations of the sixteenth-century treatises of Andreas a Lacuna of Segovia and of Leonhardt Fuchs of Tübingen.<sup>75</sup>

It is not easy to discern why he did this, or what he got out of doing so, except that it suggests a keen and timely interest in the subject of plague, though not primarily in its epidemiology. Copying out extracts and compiling interesting or useful information was certainly his style, and he also transcribed complete works on more than one occasion. Translating a treatise from Latin may have made it easier to consult or refer to, though there is nothing to suggest that the surviving manuscripts were much handled. As regards content, both the plague treatises, dating from the early to mid-sixteenth century, were largely humoral and Galenic in diagnosis and advice, recommending moderation and treatment according to one's constitution; similar material was still being published in mid-seventeenth century London. The Rivet/Berus manuscript also contains several short extracts on fairly familiar themes from a variety of sources. Some are references to historic plagues, some focus on the transmission of plague, in or by means of garments and clothing, some refer to Turkish fatalism in the face of epidemic death.<sup>76</sup> A couple of these extracts can be traced directly to works listed in the sale catalogue of Smyth's library.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> BL Sloane MSS 786, 788. It is not clear whether he translated them himself.

<sup>76</sup> 'Turkish fatalism' was a common trope in plague writings: Slack, *Impact*, pp. 49-50, 250, 336.

<sup>77</sup> BL Sloane MS 791; *Bibl. Smith.*, 'Libri Historici in Folio', no. 271, p. 94; *ibid.*, 'Libri Medici in Octavo', no. 282, p. 189.

Four of the items are concerned with the question of flight, a theme of some concern in early modern London, both the moral question for individuals and the impact that the departure of officeholders and ratepayers would have on the city they had deserted.<sup>78</sup> Fuchs, whose preventatives and treatments follow Galen, also follows Galen in arguing that flight is the best option for the individual: ‘the three adverbs Cito, Longe, Tarde, ([leave] quickly, [go] far-off, [return] slowly) are better than three apothecaries’ shops well stocked’, and flight for self-preservation is as lawful as fleeing famine or a house on fire.<sup>79</sup> Gabriel Biel presents the arguments both for and against flight, concluding that as long as duty and charity are fulfilled, it is permissible to leave.<sup>80</sup> André Rivet’s epistle covers a range of topics, including churches and plague burial, but also discusses whether and for whom fleeing the plague may be lawful. While he acknowledged that he could not resolve the question so as to convince everyone, he concluded that even magistrates and pastors were not all obliged to stay, as long as there was adequate provision for their necessary functions. Ludovicus Berus, on the other hand, while allowing those whose duties are fulfilled to flee, argued that overall it was better to stay; and doing so did not leave one open to the charge of self-slaying.<sup>81</sup> As Patrick Wallis has recently discussed, the topic of flight was certainly one of current interest and discussion; popular hostility to those who seemingly

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<sup>78</sup> See for example Margaret Healy, ‘Discourses of the plague in early modern London’, in *Epidemic disease in London*, ed. Champion, pp. 19-34.

<sup>79</sup> BL Sloane MSS 786, 788.

<sup>80</sup> BL Sloane MS 790.

<sup>81</sup> BL Sloane MS 791.

abandoned their social and moral obligations was tempered by other perspectives on loyalty and responsibility.<sup>82</sup> As far as can be seen, Smyth did not leave London in 1665, though he could probably have afforded to do so and had no post or employment obliging him to remain. Perhaps this made him more sensitive to the topic, but he writes nothing directly of himself or his choices. It is notable that these compilations and translations were largely inwardly focused, apparently for his own interest and contemplation: Smyth made no attempt, as far as we know, to publish or circulate his researches. Nor did he seek to create a narrative of the plague, either for himself or others, at least in these surviving manuscripts, limiting himself to discrete observations and quotations. In this aspect as in others, his notes on plague accord with his other known writings.

### **The Guildhall plague broadsides and Bills of Mortality and their use**

This finally brings us back to the Guildhall plague broadsides, their content, and the question of what Smyth was doing with them. The 13 items that it is contended belonged to Smyth – all endorsed in similar style – comprise three standard-format yearly bills for 1603, 1625, and 1633;<sup>83</sup> two versions of the ‘Red Crosse’ composite bill for 1625 and 1636;<sup>84</sup> four different ‘Lord have

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<sup>82</sup> Slack, *Impact*, pp. 166-9; P.H. Wallis, ‘Plagues, Morality and the Place of Medicine in Early Modern England’, *English Historical Review* Vol. CXXI No. 490 (2006), 1-24.

<sup>83</sup> GL Broadside 37.1, 3, 9.

<sup>84</sup> GL Broadside 37.15, 16.

mercy' composite bills from 1636;<sup>85</sup> and the 'Mourning-Cross' from 1665.<sup>86</sup>

There are also 'Remedies against the Infection of the Plague' by John Belson esquire, 1665; 'Observations of Mr LILLIE', 1665; and T. Cocke's 'Advice for the poor by way of Cure and Caution', also 1665.<sup>87</sup>

There are at least three possible strands to Smyth's interest in this material. The first is simply typographical and bibliographical; the second is his penchant for obtaining, perfecting, and organising information, on plague as on other subjects; the third, an interest in the actual content of the works.

For the typographical and bibliographical: Smyth was a collector of printed books, from a huge range of printers and places, and he was particularly interested in the history of print.<sup>88</sup> He drafted a text on the history of printing that debates where it originated and who first brought it to England.<sup>89</sup> He also collected quantities of current printed pamphlets and ephemera largely on political and religious subjects, though not as systematically or voraciously as George Thomason. The four variant copies of the 'Lord have mercy' from 1636, and the two copies of 'The Red Cross' from 1625 and 1636, could perhaps have been valued as interesting examples of print; as Monteyne and Jenner have shown, these composite bills were impressive examples of the typographer's art.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> GL Broadsides 28.48, 37.17, 18, 19.

<sup>86</sup> GL Broadside 26.13.

<sup>87</sup> GL Broadsides 37.21, 22, 23.

<sup>88</sup> Duff, 'The library of Richard Smyth'.

<sup>89</sup> Richard Smyth, 'On the art of printing', BL Sloane MS 722.

<sup>90</sup> Jenner, 'Plague on a page'; Monteyne, *The printed image*.

His interest in the collection and organisation of facts, including statistics, about plague seems to be what motivated his engagement with the weekly Bills of Mortality and the composite bills, complementing his known practice of compiling extensive collections of excerpts on topics such as printing, bishops, church dedications and saints, and wonders.<sup>91</sup> He was interested in historical chronology; he had been a friend of the chronologist and biographer Henry Isaacson (d. 1654), and owned a copy of the latter's *Saturni ephemerides* (1633), a huge work tabulating world events since the Creation.<sup>92</sup> He liked to correct and perfect copies of printed works, by collating variants or supplying text from one copy to another.<sup>93</sup>

All of the composite Bills that this article suggests belonged to Smyth are endorsed but most are not otherwise annotated to any significant degree. One of the 1636 'Lord have mercies' has a couple of lines filled in; one has had figures for the rest of the year filled in. The 1636 'Red Crosse' has been extensively annotated, as has the 1665 'Mourning-Cross'.

One of the four 1636 'Lord have mercies' prints weekly figures for various parish groupings up to 14 July, then leaves blank columns for the rest of year, and blanks for totals. Every line for the weekly totals has been filled in, in what looks like Smyth's hand, apparently all at one time; if so, this could not have

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<sup>91</sup> Folger MS V.a.5.10.

<sup>92</sup> *Obituary*, p. 39; BL Add MS 21096, f. 110v; P. E. McCullough, 'Isaacson, Henry (*bap.* 1581, *d.* 1654)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008  
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14480>, accessed 14 March 2017].

<sup>93</sup> Preface to *Bibl. Smith*.

been done until after December 1636, and could be much later.<sup>94</sup> The 1636 'Red Crosse' has been annotated in two hands, the first, in the centre of the sheet, filling in some weekly mortality figures, and the second, in the margins, adding information on historic plagues. It seems likely that the figures were not added by Smyth, and could date from 1636, but that the marginal annotations and the endorsement are his, and could be much later, possibly as late as 1665. The text of the broadside, which largely repeats that of the 1625 'Red Crosse' broadsides, recites the major plagues of early modern London and the numbers that died; the marginal manuscript annotations give dates and numbers for epidemics in Constantinople, Germany, and Italy, and two references to plagues in 1347-8, information that could well have derived from other works owned by Smyth.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, the 'Mourning-Cross' of 1665 also appears to have been annotated after the end of the year. The printed totals go up to 29 August 1665; manuscript figures continue in the space left by the printer to the end of December, and appear to have been written all or mostly at one time. A couple of other entries or corrections have been made on the face, including correcting the date '1591' to '1592', and then in the right and lower margin, probably week by week, are added weekly figures (totals and plague) for the

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<sup>94</sup> GL Broadside 37.19.

<sup>95</sup> GL Broadside 37.16.



whole city, from 19-26 December 1665 up to 30 October 1666 (see Figs. 2 and 3).<sup>96</sup>

In the first and last of these cases, it would appear that the annotator – Smyth – did not mark up the composite plague bill with the figures as they were published, as the printer may have intended; rather he completed the broadside after the end of the year, probably from the yearly bill published in late December. His aim seems to have been to ‘improve’ or perfect the bills with their partial totals so that the content was complete, even though this information duplicated that contained in the weekly bills he also collected. This mixed approach is not unique to Smyth. There is another composite bill in Guildhall Library, a 1665 ‘Lord have mercy’, on which the printed figures go up only to 4 July. Here the annotator (whose hand differs from Smyth’s) has added weekly totals, probably week by week and not all in one continuous session, down to 29 May 1666, in the column space left by the printer. However he too has used the margin, in this case to add weekly figures for the parish of St Martin in the Fields from 30 May 1665 to 5 June 1666, starting in the lower left margin and running in short columns along the lower margin, apparently all at one time and therefore in or after June 1666.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> GL Broadside 26.13. No weekly bills were issued for the three weeks after the Fire; a single bill, with totals for all three weeks, was published on 18 September 1666.

<sup>97</sup> GL Broadside 33.25, discussed by Jenner, ‘Plague on a page’. The Wellcome Library has a set of Bills of Mortality from 1665 in which many of the figures have been filled in by hand: Wellcome Library, London, Closed stores EPB/B, Shelfmark: 62790-7/B (8 vols.).

For the third strand, the three advice broadsides may well represent Smyth's chosen reading in time of plague, along with the treatises he transcribed or translated already discussed. 'The Observations of Mr LILLIE' discusses the origins and cause of plague, and offers both 'a prayer to be used in all families', and 'several excellent receipts & approved medicines'. Its principal recommendation is prayer and penitence, but it also lists various preventatives and cures, said to have been proven in the plague of 1625. The remedies are largely herbal, and inexpensive, with some use of London treacle; moderation in diet is recommended, but plague blisters, in case of infection, should be lanced and allowed to drain. This text is followed by figures from the weekly bill of mortality for the week of July 7. Smyth has written neatly on the face: 'Weekly Bill, July 7. 1665', and endorsed the sheet with the title and the words '... weekly Bill July 7 1665. Printed 1665'.<sup>98</sup>

'Remedies against the Infection of the Plague', 'Composed by John Belson esquire' has a more hard-sell approach, with explicit directions for fumigation of rooms and textiles and a description of a perfumed bag, 'Celestial water', and a cordial tincture, and notes of where to buy them. The sheet has a note in ink at the bottom 'Aug. 1665' and is endorsed with the title and 'pr. 1665'.<sup>99</sup>

Dr Thomas Cocke's 'Advice for the poor by way of Cure and Caution' was published in or after August 1665; it too has a commercial object, in this case to promote the printing and distribution of itself to poor families, so that those who could not afford or obtain a physician's advice could nurse their families at a cost of 'less then 12d.' Its medical basis is again Galenic (he praises

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<sup>98</sup> GL Broadside 37.22.

<sup>99</sup> GL Broadside 37.21.

'Gallen' as 'so worthy a person'), recommending temperance, sweating, vomits, and bleeding, and it gives recipes for plaisters, ointments, and fumes, but it also aims to sell a proprietary fume and lozenge. It has a commendation from the duke of Albemarle and others, dated 3 and 4 August. Smyth has endorsed it 'R.COCKE [sic] his Aduice to the Poore of Cure & Caution Ao 1665'.<sup>100</sup> Cocke's aim was to get the richer parishioners to subsidise the distribution of free copies to every family, especially the poorer sort, and the text was evidently printed more than once, with a (presumably) second printing in booklet form including additional remedies.<sup>101</sup>

It is very tempting to conclude that Smyth acquired and kept these three broadsides for their content – useful advice and information.<sup>102</sup> The medical advice they give is similar to that in the plague tracts Smyth translated or transcribed, though they also offer immediate remedy in the form of patent medicines. Their somewhat old-fashioned recommendations may reflect Smyth's age – he was 75 in 1665, and his medical views may not have kept pace with the changing times – but they certainly underline the continuing

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<sup>100</sup> GL Broadside 37.23.

<sup>101</sup> EEBO, from BL: 'A Directory for the poore, against the Plague and Infectious Diseases' by Roger Dixon: Wing D1749.

<sup>102</sup> GL Broadside 26.4, 'The cities comfort; or, Patridolphilus his theologicall and physicall preservatives against the plague', of 1625, has notes on the verso 'A medicen for the Plague practised by the Lo: Stourton. Sent to him by his Sonn', with the comment that 'this medecen did [?] recov' all that did take it in the Lo. Stourton's house'. However, it seems unlikely that this was one of Smyth's broadsides.

market for Galenic diagnosis and remedies in later seventeenth-century London<sup>103</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Richard Smyth's 'reading' of plague thus comprised a variety of activities and responses. Like many other middling Londoners, he seems to have subscribed to the weekly Bills of Mortality; perhaps unusually, he kept his collection in good order, and also bought the yearly summary bills. He collected printed works of both practical and antiquarian value, possibly in large numbers; some at least of them he read and excerpted, or annotated the originals with other information. He undertook a complicated collation of data on historic plagues and the current epidemic. He took the trouble to transcribe and translate particular works, at a time when plague, if beginning to decline, was still raging fiercely in the city. He seems to have been exercised by the question of whether fleeing the plague was morally and socially legitimate, and to have addressed this, in characteristic fashion, by searching his collection for information and precedents. In compiling his personal 'Catalogue of all such persons deceased as I knew in their life time' and noting those who died of plague he made a valuable addition to our understanding of the impact of plague on inhabitants of seventeenth-century London. And the records of his library complement modern bibliographies of plague writing by demonstrating the breadth and quantity of works available, including the prices for which such works were changing hands in 1682, and

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. Slack, *Impact*, pp. 30-6.

help to show how text and print were central to the experience of plague in early modern London.