



It is with considerable sadness that the WARG committee had to review the 2020 programme of talks and visits and, in line with the Government's directive, has concluded we are unable to proceed as planned. We have cancelled the talks for April and May, and have now decided that the visit to the Bursledon Brickworks on June 14th should also be put on hold.

We sincerely hope that we shall be able to recommence in July with the visit to Winchester College Treasury, and also to proceed with the Big Dig in August, which will of course depend on the landowner. We shall keep you posted on this.

All being well talks will recommence with Dr. John Crook, who many of you will know as an eminent local historian, in September.

We shall of course be looking to reschedule the lost talks and visits and I am sure we do not have to remind WARG members to:

Stay at home. Stay safe. Save lives.

However...



If you are missing the monthly talks, here is a little something hopefully to fill a bit of the gap.

For those of us old enough to remember Sir Malcolm Sargent, he used to call his short encores 'Lollipops'. Here is a WARG lollipop for you.

For lovers of the works of Shakespeare, you may know that he went through a period similar to this during the 'Black Plague', but also, during that time he wrote some of his greatest work. In times of adversity, creativity can flourish – as we are currently seeing.

From autumn 1592 to May 1594, London's theatres went dark, much like today. This happened again from April 1603 to April 1604. Although there was some touring possible, with no requirement for new plays, it is thought that Shakespeare turned to poetry and wrote '***Venus and Adonis***' and '***The Rape of Lucrece***' during this time.

Hints of the effect of the plague on society at that time can be seen in ***Romeo and Juliet***, in the famous curse by Mercutio, "***A plague o' both your houses!***" Ironically, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre was to have staged this play in 2020.

In ***Timon of Athens*** when Timon self isolates in a cave he curses all Athenians by "***Breath infect breath, / at their society, as their friendship, may / merely poison!***" Evidence of an early understanding of infection transmission and control?

My favourite play of all, ***King Lear***, (I have unashamedly both laughed and cried during a Globe performance of this), is likely to have been written around 1605 and 1606, and could have been influenced by the outbreak of plague in 1606. If Shakespeare wrote the play when quarantined, a societal mood of depression may certainly be reflected in Lear's desolation during the storm, "***Vengeance! plague! death! confusion!***" Macbeth too, shows he is fearful of retribution for the murder of Duncan, "***plague the inventor***" will the retribution be infection with the plague?

So, as you read this and wonder when this will all come to an end, just remember it is very possible that some of the greatest theatre came from similar epidemics. At least social distancing is more humane than in Shakespeare's day, and no one is coming to board up your house with you in it to prevent the disease spreading! Before we know it, the theatres will reopen stronger than ever. In the meantime, let the Bard end things on a cheerier note with this line from ***The Two Gentlemen of Verona***: "***Hope is a lover's staff; walk hence with that / And manage it against despairing thoughts.***"

When we meet again, why, we shall smile Julius Caesar Act 5 Scene 1.

Stay safe, Janet Backhouse – with thanks to the author of the article on the Rose at Kingston website online 25/03/2020