

# Controlling corruption: regulating meat consumption as a preventative to plague in seventeenth-century London

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**ABSTRACT:** Seventeenth-century medical theory saw epidemic diseases like the plague as being caused by stinking miasmas resulting from putrefying matter polluting the air. The butchers' trade was singled out in London as a major polluter, implicated in both the regulatory literature and popular images as corrupting both the physical and moral health of the City and its citizens. Controlling the food trades, especially the butchers', was therefore an essential part of containing environmental pollution and preventing disease.

The purpose of urban regulation is to establish and maintain social order and stability. The regulatory measures selected articulate public policy and reflect concepts both of an ideal social order to be maintained, and of the perceived threats that endanger that order. This regulation includes controls on economic activities, and the protection of public health, with the two areas of concern overlapping where the regulation of the processing, sale and consumption of food is involved. Studies of the history of food regulation have assumed that concerns about controlling the food trades are a modern issue, as are the public health measures and environmental regulations with which food quality concerns intersect. While the long history of public health measures and environmental regulation has been well established,<sup>1</sup> the control of the food trades as a connected aspect of these broader regulatory areas needs to be addressed. Paul Slack has pointed to the usefulness of crisis events, such as outbreaks of epidemic disease, in illuminating the institutional structures and beliefs of 'the societies with which they collide', and that this is demonstrated

\* All printed primary material cited in this article was accessed through Early English Books Online unless otherwise stated. Quotations from primary sources retain the spelling and punctuation of the original text.

<sup>1</sup> H. Cook, 'Policing the health of London: the College of Physicians and the early Stuart monarchy', *Social History of Medicine*, 2 (1989), 1–33; M. Jenner, 'Early modern conceptions of "cleanliness" and "dirt" as reflected in the environmental regulation of London c. 1530 – c. 1700', Oxford University Ph.D. thesis, 1991.

through the ways in which the crisis is interpreted, and the measures taken in response to perceived threats.<sup>2</sup> This article examines communications between the lord mayor and aldermen of London and the privy council during the 1630 outbreak of plague, using this as a lens to explore how early modern authorities regulated the urban environment in response to the threat of plague in seventeenth-century London, and the beliefs their strategies reflected. The 1630 plague orders invoked traditional religious notions of providence and health, and drew on urban customs of controlling pollution, but were also shaped by emerging medical discourses and contemporary political conflicts.

Although the 1630 plague outbreak was a relatively minor one,<sup>3</sup> and is not usually regarded as a significant crisis, 'it was not always the gravest crisis which evoked the fullest and most articulate reaction'.<sup>4</sup> The 1630 plague coincided with poor harvests and economic depression, and this combination of interrelated factors, along with a desire to avoid a disaster on the scale of the previous outbreak of 1625, resulted in an unusual level of regulatory attention and intervention on the part of the crown.<sup>5</sup> This was also the beginning of Charles I's Personal Rule, when the City government's resistance to Charles' moves to reform the body politic brought them into conflict, and the City increasingly under the regulation of the privy council.<sup>6</sup> It is the degree of attention given by the different levels of government, not the actual numbers of deaths, which makes the 1630 outbreak useful in examining the beliefs that underpinned the strategies employed, particularly those that focused on the food traders in the City.

In November 1630, the mayor and aldermen of London wrote to the privy council outlining their diligence in taking measures to prevent the spread of plague.<sup>7</sup> One of these measures involved ordering the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers to search out those breaking the fish day regulations by producing and consuming meat. Fish days were fast days where the killing, processing, sale and consumption of meat were proscribed by law. They could, but did not necessarily, include Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, the Sabbath,<sup>8</sup> Ember days, Lent and

<sup>2</sup> P. Slack, *The Impact of Plague in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1985), 4.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, 146, for the relative burial figures. The outbreaks of 1603, 1625 and, to a lesser degree, 1609 and 1636 led to a far greater number of deaths that were attributed to plague than that of 1630.

<sup>4</sup> P. Slack, 'Books of orders: the making of English social policy, 1577–1631', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 30 (1980), 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–7.

<sup>6</sup> Cook, 'Policing the health of London', 30–1.

<sup>7</sup> Corporation of London, *Remembrancia*, vol. VII, letter 56. Consulted on microfilm held at the London Metropolitan Archives. Numbering used is that found on the right-hand side of each document and is consistent with that found in the Corporation of London, *Analytical Index, to the Series of Records Known as the Remembrancia. Preserved among the Archives of the City of London A.D. 1579–1664* (London 1878).

<sup>8</sup> The Sabbath was a contested term with debates focusing not only on whether the Sabbath should be strictly observed, but also on whether the term 'Sabbath' referred to Saturday

extraordinary days of fasting called by the crown or, after 1642, by parliament.<sup>9</sup> However, how fast days were defined and which days were deemed significant were contested issues. Ideas of appropriate observance also differed, as did motivations for fasting.<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth I promoted an additional weekly fish day on Wednesdays, but as part of a strategy to maintain the navy.<sup>11</sup> At parliament's insistence, Charles I reinstated Wednesday fasts in 1642, but these were monthly not weekly, and held for religious not secular reasons.<sup>12</sup> Charles also called extraordinary fasts during plague outbreaks, but he limited the number, length and content of these fast day services, which led to further contention.<sup>13</sup>

In May and June of 1631 further letters to the Lords of Council described continued enforcement of the fish days, claiming their search had been so successful in controlling the populace that few delinquents were now being found.<sup>14</sup> In these later letters the discussion of the successful enforcement of fish days accompanied assurances that the plague was departing, and subsequently had departed, from the city. The implication was that the two

or Sunday. See D.S. Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden, 1988), ch. 1; and J. Dennison, *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532–1700* (Lanham, MD, 1983).

- <sup>9</sup> England and Wales, *A Collection of Such Statutes as Are Now in Force and Made in the Reigns of K. Ed. 6, Queen Eliz., K. James 1st, & K. Charles the 1st which Enjoyn the Observation of Lent, and Other Fish Days throughout the Year, with the Reasons for Enjoyning the Same* (London, 1685).
- <sup>10</sup> Godly ministers and parliamentarians called for the strict observance of the Sabbath and for frequent daylong fasts determined by personal conscience and as crises warranted, but argued against the observance of set liturgical fasts. The crown and the bishops, especially under Charles I, disapproved of godly fasting, confining fast days to those officially part of the church calendar or as ordered by the crown during periods of crisis, with Sundays designated a day of rest. While the puritans emphasized personal admonition through sermons to bring about proper humiliation and repentance, and had a far greater belief in providence as first cause, the episcopacy under Laud advocated the use of set prayers as ordained by authority, and Charles I's policies placed greater emphasis on medical explanations of disease. C. Durston, "'For the better humiliation of the people': public days of fasting and thanksgiving during the English Revolution", *Seventeenth Century*, 7 (1992), 129–49; C. Durston and J. Eales, 'Introduction: the Puritan ethos 1560–1700', in C. Durston and J. Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism* (London, 1996), 21; A. Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), especially 156–66; T. Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620–1643* (Cambridge, 1997), 60–74.
- <sup>11</sup> England and Wales, *Statutes at Large, in Paragraphs and Sections or Numbers, from the Magna Carta to the End of the Session of Parliament, March 14 1704* (London, 1706), vol. I, 792. In 5 Eliz. 5 Cap. XI Elizabeth ordered that Wednesdays were to be 'used and observed as a fish day . . . as the Saturdays in every week be or ought to be observed' marking both Wednesdays and Saturdays as fast days, though they were kept for different reasons.
- <sup>12</sup> 'August 1642: an ordinance for the better observation of the monethly fast', in C.H. Firth and R.S. Rait (eds.), *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660* (1911), 22–4. URL: [www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=55738&strquery=fast](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=55738&strquery=fast). Date accessed: 27 Oct. 2008; Durston, 'For the better humiliation of the people', 132–4, these fasts were observed by parliament throughout the Civil War, but discontinued after Charles I's execution in 1649. Charles changed the day of fasting for his forces to Fridays.
- <sup>13</sup> Durston, 'For the better humiliation of the people', 130–1; W. Crashaw, *Londons Lamentation for her Sinnes and Complaint to the Lord her God . . . Together with a Soueraigne Receipt against the Plague* (London, 1625), see the 'Epistle dedicatory'.
- <sup>14</sup> Corporation of London, *Remembrancia*, vol. VII, letters 64 and 66.

situations were related. These letters responded to specific instructions sent to the lord mayor and aldermen by the privy council, and appeared against a background of ongoing dissatisfaction over the City's failure to implement effective and timely action in times of plague, particularly over their lack of response to parliamentary orders during the outbreak of 1625, when one fifth of London's population died.<sup>15</sup> Nor was the City's inaction in earlier epidemics the only area of conflict between the crown and the corporation regarding the control and regulation of the City. Under Charles' Personal Rule, concerted efforts were made to tackle a range of social problems, including public health, on a national scale, and to clean up what royal proclamations designated the 'the Imperiale Seate and Chamber of this our Kingdome'.<sup>16</sup> Charles' programme brought the corporation of London interests into conflict with those claimed by the crown on a number of issues.<sup>17</sup> One of Charles' initiatives was to establish a permanent office of health, with absolute power over all other authorities to force the implementation of orders, and to override the problems of conflicting jurisdictional boundaries across a metropolis that had spread outside the City's chartered control.<sup>18</sup> Although the aldermen were to have representation in this office, it would have eroded the City's authority, and was resisted. One purpose of the letters, therefore, was to present the City government's actions in a positive light, and to reassure the Lords of Council that outside intervention was unnecessary.

In the 1630 letter, the actions the City claimed to have taken involved the sequestration of infected households within their houses and the enforcement of fast days by setting the fishmongers to search for breaches of the fast day regulations prohibiting the slaughter, sale, preparation and consumption of meat on fast days. These measures were followed by descriptions of actions taken for ensuring both the preservation of the Thames and the fish stocks it contained, and an adequate supply of grain to defend against dearth. The conservancy of the Thames was another jurisdictional bone of contention between the crown and the City and this reassurance of action on the part of the corporation served the dual purpose of demonstrating effective governance, while maintaining the City's right to govern.<sup>19</sup> While it would not appear on the surface that the

<sup>15</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 151 and 213–15.

<sup>16</sup> Slack, 'Books of orders', 10–11.

<sup>17</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 213–19; Cook, 'Policing the health of London', 22–7; J. Robertson, 'Persuading the citizens?: Charles I and London Bridge', *Historical Research*, 79 (2006), 512–33.

<sup>18</sup> Slack, 'Books of orders', 1–22.

<sup>19</sup> Stow, *The Survey of London Containing the Original, Increase, Modern Estate and Government of that City, Methodically Set Down . . . Inlarged by the Care and Diligence of A.M. In the Year 1618; and Now Compleatly Finished by the Study & Labour of A.M., H.D. and Others, This Present Year 1633* (London, 1633), 18–25. Slack 'Books of orders', 4. The City needed to show effective management, as the dearth orders clearly threatened direct intervention from the crown if the mayor and aldermen did not effectively regulate the market and keep supplies up and prices down.

latter two measures were directly related to plague control, they covered the parallel concern of ensuring adequate food supplies to maintain the City's populace. The dearth orders, also reissued in 1630, clearly connected the two issues, stating that their purpose was to prevent 'famyne and the diseases which follow the want of wholesome foode'.<sup>20</sup> In looking at the two measures the mayor and aldermen associated with plague prevention and control, questions arise regarding what the City officials actually claimed to have done.

The first control measure of the mayor and aldermen, the sequestration of plague victims and their families, and the debates that arose regarding its possible effectiveness as a preventative against the spread of plague, have been discussed by medical historians.<sup>21</sup> The question of how the enforcement of fast days fitted into contemporary beliefs about effective prevention of disease has not been as thoroughly addressed. Although historians have discussed the religious purpose of repentance and atonement in relation to fast days, the placement of periodic abstinence from meat and the enforcement of fish days within early modern dietary theory, and the enforcement of fast day regulations as a preventative measure, are often ignored.<sup>22</sup> This is despite a general consensus that religious and medical beliefs at this time cannot be divorced from each other but rather combined to explain the occurrence of disease and its transmission, and to determine possible treatment.<sup>23</sup> While discussions of plague advice explore the medical understandings underlying these orders, particularly focusing on the therapeutic remedies attached to plague orders for treatment of the disease once contracted, they tend to either ignore or gloss over the preventative dietary aspects of this advice. Even where the importance of dietary advice within humoral theories of medicine is acknowledged, measures to control the food trades as part of public health initiatives have remained unexplored.<sup>24</sup> This article therefore aims to bring early modern dietary regimens back into focus

<sup>20</sup> Slack, 'Books of orders', 7.

<sup>21</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 228 and 254.

<sup>22</sup> K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1971), 114–16.

<sup>23</sup> O.P. Grell, 'Plague, prayer and physick: Helmontian medicine in Restoration England', in O. Grell and A. Cunningham (eds.), *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (Aldershot, 1996), 204–5; A. Wear, 'Interfaces: perceptions of health and illness in early modern England', in R. Porter and A. Wear (eds.), *Problems and Methods in the History of Medicine* (London, 1987), 240; A. Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680* (Cambridge, 2000), 28–34.

<sup>24</sup> Slack's comprehensive examination of the plague in Tudor and Stuart England discusses the medical implications but does not include diet in this discussion, nor does he relate plague advice to more generalized contemporary health advice. Slack, *Impact of Plague*. Wear and Pelling are exceptions. Wear, *Knowledge and Practice*, gives detailed coverage to the dietary aspects of the plague advice and the contribution of dietary theory to understandings of the causes and treatments of plague. However, he fails to incorporate the food trades, their regulation or fast day enforcement within this framework. M. Pelling, 'Food, status and knowledge: attitudes to diet in early modern England', in M. Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England*

and to place the enforcement of fast or fish days specifically, and early modern regulation of the food traders more generally, within the context of regulating the urban environment for the prevention and control of disease. It will examine ideas regarding the causes and treatment of plague and how these relate to perceptions of the butchers' trade.

### Ideas about plague

Early modern theories of plague occurrence and of its prevention and cure revolved around ideas of corruption. As Paul Slack points out, this 'was not only a physical process but also a moral one'.<sup>25</sup> This corruption affected the soul, the environment and the body. *The Charitable Pestmaster* published in 1641 succinctly summarized contemporary beliefs about the causes of plague, stating that the 'first is sin, which ought to be repented of. The second an infected and corrupted air, which should be avoided. The third an evill diet, which should be amended. The fourth are evill humours heaped together in the body, being apt to putrifie, and beget a Fever, which must be taken away by convenient medicines.'<sup>26</sup> The steps to rectify and overcome the disease involved first, making peace with God, and secondly, shunning all things that 'begat disease'. This latter measure was discussed at some length in most of the plague advice literature and approaches to it were holistic, being firstly preventative and then remedial. They involved calls to cleanse the physical environment and purify the air, to moderate diet and avoid excess and to adopt dietary and medicinal regimens that either balanced the humours or purged the body.

Of the four suspected causes of plague, there is an obvious link between the second two causes: 'evill diet' and 'evill humours', and food consumption. While the connection is less obvious, the first two causes – sin and polluted air – were also implied. As the suppliers of the food consumed, the food trades were therefore heavily implicated as sources of possible corruption. In addition to concerns about the wholesomeness of their wares, the food traders provided the sites and means of excess and sin, and contributed to the physical obstruction and pollution of the City's streets and air. Though essential to the feeding of the City of London, if left uncontrolled they posed a threat to the bodies of that same City and the individuals it contained. The City government's ideas of control operated on a set of variables that ranged from cleansing the external citywide environment to the internal purification and control of the individual.

(London, 1998), 42–4, indicates the importance of food regulation to maintenance of social order but does not tie this to plague controls.

<sup>25</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 28–9.

<sup>26</sup> T. Sherwood, *The Charitable Pestmaster, or, the Cure of the Plague, Containing a Few Short and Necessary Instructions How to Preserve the Body from Infection of the Plague, as Also to Cure Those that Are Infected* (London, 1641), 1.

### Sin and repentance

Pre-Civil War plague orders, plague advice texts and general commentaries on the times consistently drew on God's displeasure as primary cause for plague, with natural causes as a secondary means of God's achieving retribution.<sup>27</sup> This argument was not without controversy.<sup>28</sup> In general, however, prayers and atonement for sins were accepted as a necessary component of efforts for the prevention (or cure) of plague, to be implemented in conjunction with the health measures ordered. In discussing plague measures, the author of *Londons Lamentation for her Sinnes* (1625), gives the reason for public fasting and prayer as being 'for the diverting of this publike Iudgement'.<sup>29</sup> Within this framework, actions that disordered the proper observance of the fasts risked causing a continuation of disease. The Butchers' Company Ordinances of 1607 included two items relating to the proper observance of the Sabbath and fast days. These ordinances forbade butchers from opening a shop or putting flesh to sale, from driving cattle or other stock through the City or from killing any animals on these days. However, it is clear from the repetition of the proclamations, from letters recorded in the Corporation of London's *Remembrancia* and from court records that the butchers' ordinances, and the acts of parliament they related to, were not observed by all members of the butchers' trade.<sup>30</sup>

That the butchers' failure to observe the fast day restrictions reached the awareness of the wider public can be seen in popular literature. The ballad *Iack a Lent* (1620) asserted that the greatest enemies of Lent were dogs, butchers and Puritans, and outlined the ways in which some butchers eluded control by resorting 'into Stables, Privies, Sellers

<sup>27</sup> Proclamations: England and Wales. Sovereign, James I: king of England, *By the King. A Proclamation for Restraint of Killing, Dressing, and Eating of Flesh in Lent or on Fish Dayes* (London, 1620); England and Wales, *A Collection of . . . Statutes*. Plague texts: City of London and Court of Aldermen, *The Orders and Directions, of the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen, . . . during the Time of the Present Visitation of the Plague* (London, 1665), 1; F. Herring, *Certaine Rules, Directions, or Aduertisments for This Time of Pestilentiall Contagion* (London, 1625); S. Hobbes, *A New Treatise of the Pestilence, Containing the Causes, Signes, Preseruatiues and Cure Thereof the Like not before This Time Published [sic]* (London, 1603); Sherwood, *The Charitable Pestmaster*; Anon., *Londons Lamentation. Or a Fit Admonishment for City and Countrey, Wherein Is Described Certaine Causes of This Affliction and Visitation of the Plague, Yeare 1641* (London, 1641).

<sup>28</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 228–44; Walsham, *Providence*, 158–66; see also n. 11 above.

<sup>29</sup> Crashaw, *Londons Lamentation for her Sinnes*. In the 'Epistle dedicatory' Crashaw explains the move by Charles I to cut back the days of public fasting and prayer to Sundays only while encouraging private prayers and fasting on the other times outlined in the statutes as fish days as being 'Out of no dislike for Fasting and Prayer, nor any wearinesse of those holy exercises. . . . But out of conscience to his God and care of his subjects lives.'

<sup>30</sup> Corporation of London, *Remembrancia*, vol. III, letters 3, 4, 37, 72, 91, vol. IV, letter 13, vol. V, letter 12, vol. VI, letter 130, vol. VII, letter 86; Corporation of London Records Office (CLRO), Journals of Common Council: COL/CC/01/01/28 fols. 341v, 349v, 351r–351v, /29 fols. 39, 228v, /30 fols. 20v, 176v, /33 fols. 142–4, 202, 239–40; London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), Westminster Sessions Rolls: WJ/SR(NS)1A/2, WJ/SR(NS)8/69–70, WJ/SR(NS)2/104–5, WJ/SR(NS)3/089, WJ/SR(NS)24/117–23, WJ/SR(NS)27/72

[cellars], Sir Francis Drakes Ship at Detford, My Lord Mayors Barge, and divers secret unsuspected places' to make 'private Shambles with kilcalfe cruelty and sheepe-slaughtering murder, to the abuse of Lent, the deceiving of Informers, and the great griefe of every zealous fishmonger'.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, *Lamentable Complaints* published in 1641 consists of a dialogue between Kilcalfe the butcher and Hop the brewer regarding the effect a parliamentary ruling to enforce the observance of the Sabbath would have on their trade. Their complaint is that they will both go out of business if the cooks, victualling houses and alehouses have their Sabbath trade curtailed. The piece uses the complaint to highlight the frauds being perpetrated on customers by the victuallers, in which the butchers and brewers who supplied them colluded. The oath Kilcalfe gives to prove the truth of what he is saying also draws on the image of butchers as Sabbath and fast day breakers when he exclaims: 'Sure, say you! Am I sure that ever I knokt downe an oxe and cut his throat on a Sunday morning thinke you?'<sup>32</sup> The butchers were thus presented as sources of moral corruption.

The mayor's letters of 1630 and 1631 raise an interesting point about the enforcement of fish days, as the role of policing these regulations was given to the Fishmongers in London and not to the Butchers' Company as might have been expected. Once companies gained incorporation their charters gave them the right and responsibility to search and discipline their members and any others practising their trade. That the City appointed the Fishmongers to search and not the Butchers indicated an awareness of the conflict of interest inherent in the ways the Companies regulated their trades, and a lack of confidence in the willingness and ability of the Company's officers to enforce the regulations. This awareness that searchers should come from outside the food trade to be investigated was also evident in earlier appointments of non-vitualling tradesmen to search the food markets in the 1590s, when the anxiety about market practices was acute.<sup>33</sup>

### Polluting the City

If invoking God's displeasure through moral corruption brought plague as retribution, the means of infection and transmission was believed to be the physical corruption and pollution of the air. In 1603 Stephen Hobbes defined the plague, or pestilence, as 'nothing else then a rotten or persistent

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Iack a Lent his Beginning and Entertainment with the Many Pranks of his Gentleman-Vsher Shrooe Tuesday that Goes before Him, and his Foot-Man Hunger Attending. With New Additions. Dedicated Both to the Butchers Farewell and the Fishmongers Entrance: Written to Choake Melancholy and to Feed Mirth* (London, 1620).

<sup>32</sup> Anon., *The Lamentable Complaints of Hop the Brewer and Kilcalfe the Butcher as They Met by Chance in the Countrey, against the Restraint Lately Set out by the Parliament, against Tapsters and Cookes, Which Hath Caused Them to Cracke their Credit and Betake Them to their Heeles* (1641).

<sup>33</sup> C. Barron and V. Harding, *Hugh Alley's Caveat: The Markets of London in 1598*, London Topographical Society (London, 1988), 23–5.



fever, ... being ingendred by a rotten and corrupt ayre by a hidden and secret propertie which it hath'.<sup>34</sup> This corrupt air, or miasma, was believed to consist of the stinking vapours. A multitude of pollutant sources are named in the texts including carrion and filth left in the streets, and the manure of animals (and people).<sup>35</sup> The means by which the infection then entered the body was through inhalation of corrupt air into the lungs. From the lungs the corrupt air then went to the heart before being dispersed via the veins and arteries to all parts of the body. Once in the body this miasma bred the plague infection, first assaulting 'the spirits: next the humours: and lastly the very fine firme substance of the whole body'.<sup>36</sup> If polluted air was believed to be the source of infection, the obvious countermeasure to prevent the spread of plague was to purify the air and clean the environment.

The food trades, and especially the butchers who dealt with dead meat carcasses, were suspected of contributing to the pollution of the city, and as such became the focus of orders to clean the City's streets and were targeted in the orders of the markets. While this concern applied to all food traders, the butchers were especially singled out as a polluting trade. The orders, ordinances and by-laws for the Guildable manor of Southwark, which came under the City's jurisdiction, included five separate orders regarding the butchers.<sup>37</sup> These ordinances were followed by the 'Orders of the Market', in which the butchers featured to an even greater degree. Of the 26 items listed in the 1634 orders 11 related to the butchers and to sales of meat, including item 15 banning slaughterhouses. In contrast, the bakers were mentioned twice, and the fish women, meal men and those selling herbs and roots are mentioned only once each. All other items were directed at the officers of the markets and borough or were general statements regarding the setting up of stalls.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in 'An advice of the physicians' bound into the sets of orders sent out to justices of the peace during the 1630 and 1636 outbreaks of plague, part of the instruction 'that all established good orders bee revived' included the removal of all slaughterhouses to outside the liberties of London on the grounds that they were inherently offensive.<sup>39</sup> The revival of orders against the sale of corrupt flesh and fish was similarly called for, with an enjoinder that they

<sup>34</sup> Hobbes, *A Nevv Treatise of the Pestilence*, A2.

<sup>35</sup> T. Cogan, *The Haven of Health: Chiefly Gathered for the Comfort of Students, and Consequently of All Those that Have a Care of their Health, Amplified upon Five Words of Hippocrates, Written Epid. 6. Labour, Cibus, Potio, Somnus, Venus. Hereunto Is Added a Preservation from the Pestilence, with a Short Censure of the Late Sicknes at Oxford* (London, 1636), 297; Hobbes, *A Nevv Treatise of the Pestilence*, A3.

<sup>36</sup> Cogan, *Haven of Health*, 309.

<sup>37</sup> CLRO CLA/043/01/009 1624: 'S[outh]walk orders or ordinances and By Lawes made by the Juro[r]s of this Courte to be observed and kepte by the Inhabitants of this manor.'

<sup>38</sup> CLRO CLA/043/01/009 1634: 'Orders for the market', 21–6.

<sup>39</sup> England and Wales, *Certaine Statutes especially Selected, and Commanded by His Maiestie to Be Carefully Put in Execution by All Justices, and Other Officers of the Peace throughout the Realme; ... Also Certaine Orders Thought Meete by his Maiestie and his Privie Counsell, to Bee Put in Execution, together with Sundry Good Rules, Preservatives, and Medicines against the Infection*

be strictly executed. This latter order was reinforced in greater detail under the instructions for cleaning the streets in the attachment the 'Orders for Health', which specified measures 'for the preventing and avoiding of the Infection of Sicknesse'.

An awareness of what constituted the offensive nature of the butchers' premises is clearly visible in the Butchers' Company ordinances. The 1607 ordinances contained orders that the streets were to be kept clean by ensuring that there was no dumping of offal or ordure in the streets, and that butchers were not to allow blood to run down the streets when slaughtering animals. The butchers were further ordered to ensure that the waste was carried to the barrow houses for disposal in as discreet and secret a manner possible so as not to cause offence. This concern remained in the later sets of orders.<sup>40</sup> These orders link the butchers to plague orders for the cleaning of the streets of decaying matter to prevent corrupted air. Clearly, to contemporary minds controlling the butchers was a means of both preventing and counteracting disease.

The City's orders were responses to ongoing complaints about the markets. These complaints focused on the detritus left behind by the food traders, both by their animals and their wares.<sup>41</sup> *The Lawes of the Markette* gave general orders for the cleaning of the market, and specifically forbade the butchers from casting 'the inwardes of beastes in the streetes, cleaves off beastes feets, bones, hornes of Sheepe, or other such like'. The Innholders were the only other trade specifically named, being ordered not to push the dung from their stables into the street. That the market orders and the Company's environmental ordinances were frequently broken is clear from the repeated references in court records to butchers allowing blood to run down the streets and failing adequately to dispose of offal. The surviving presentments for the Leet Courts of the Guildable and King's manors in the Borough of Southwark show this as an ongoing issue, usually

*of the Plague, Set Downe by the Colledge of the Physicians upon His Maiesties Speciall Command* (London, 1630); Royal College of Physicians of London, *Certain Necessary Directions, Aswell for the Cure of the Plague as for Preuenting the Infection; with Many Easie Medicines of Small Charge, very Profitable to His Maiesties Subiects / Set Downe by the Colledge of Physicians by the Kings Maiesties Speciall Command; with Sundry Orders Thought Meet by His Maiestie, and His Priuie Councill, to Be Carefully Executed for Preuention of the Plague; Also Certaine Select Statutes Commanded by His Maiestie to Be Put in Execution by All Iustices, and Other Officers of the Peace throughout the Realme; Together with His Maiesties Proclamation for Further Direction Therein, and a Decree in Starre-Chamber, concerning Buildings and in-Mates* (London, 1636).

<sup>40</sup> For 1607 see Guildhall Library (GL) MS 10561, 92–3 orders 50 and 51; and for 1638 see GL MS 09809 ordinances 53, 54, 55. From no. 54 it can be seen that the officers of the Company have failed to enforce the order, as this is an attempt to make observation and enforcement compulsory.

<sup>41</sup> Corporation of London, *The Lawes of the Markette* (London, 1562). This book was reprinted in identical format and wording in 1595, 1620, 1653, 1668 and 1677. Corporation of London, *Whereas against Divers Lawes, Orders and Provisions* (London, 1657), contained orders to remove the vegetable sellers from the High Street in Cheap Ward, justifying this on the basis of the 'anoyance thence arising from the unwholsome smells and stenches of the parings of Roots, Plants and other filth continually left and lying scattered and corrupting, in that principal Street and passage of the City'.

listed under ‘annoyances’.<sup>42</sup> The wording of these presentments was fairly standard with the offender accused of ‘throweing and sweeping his offal and other noysome stuffe into the streete to the grievous annoyance of the inhabitants’. When in 1624 in the Guildable manor of Southwark a butcher, Gyles ffoster, went so far as to annoy the church with ‘bloude & filth issueinge out of his slaughter house’, there was no greater tone of indignation.<sup>43</sup> This is surprising as not only was he corrupting the physical environment of the street, but he was also polluting a house of God in a very tangible way. While this failure to register any greater reaction could be explained by the fact that this was a legal record of fines amerced and therefore stuck to the bare minimum of information, it might also have been due to the fact that the failure of butchers to dispose of blood and offal correctly was such a constant issue.

It is not just in the court records that this image of the butchers as polluters appears. In his treatise *Fumifugium*, published in 1661, John Evelyn included the butchers as one of the trades that should be excluded from the City in order to avoid ‘horrid stinks, niderous and unwholesome smells’ produced by corrupted blood.<sup>44</sup> The butchers were the only food trade identified by Evelyn as requiring removal from the City, advocating that at the very least ‘should noe Cattel be kill’d within the City’.<sup>45</sup> The image of the butchers as polluters of the City did not go away, and by the 1720s the butchers were fighting a rearguard action to prevent the expulsion of the slaughterhouses from the City. In 1721 the Court of Aldermen again ordered the daily cleansing of the markets and banned the slaughter of animals from the markets, shops and streets of the City.<sup>46</sup> This order was made in response to further complaints about the filth of the markets, and especially targeted the flesh markets. The order coincided with a concerted campaign in 1720 – the last time plague appeared to threaten the City of London, which aimed to get a bill passed in parliament for the removal of the slaughterhouses from the City and its surrounds, the concern was not so much the slaughtering itself, but rather the build up of the blood, offal and other refuse that the slaughtering process generated.<sup>47</sup> Its effectiveness without the support

<sup>42</sup> For Southwark, see CLRO CLA/043/01/009 the Leet Presentments for the Guildable and King’s manors 1620–54 and CLA/043/01/010 for the Guildable manor 1660–79.

<sup>43</sup> CLRO CLA/043/01/009 ‘Annoyances am[er]ced’, 19 Oct. 1624.

<sup>44</sup> J. Evelyn, *Fumifugium, or, the Inconveniencie of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated Together with Some Remedies Humbly Proposed by J.E., Esq., to His Sacred Majestie and to the Parliament now Assembled* (London, 1661), 20–2. Evelyn’s publication had three parts. The first was aimed at those trades that burnt large quantities of sea-coal, from which he excluded the food producers focusing instead on the manufacturing trades. The second, which targeted butchers, tallow-chandlers, burial grounds and charnel houses, identified other activities that corrupted the environment. The fishmongers got only a passing mention in this section. The third part advocated plantings of gardens to cordon off the habitations of the better sort and improve the air with the scent of aromatic plants.

<sup>45</sup> Evelyn, *Fumifugium*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> CLRO CLA/009/01/012.

<sup>47</sup> CLRO COL/RMD/RM/01/03/003/9.

of national legislation from parliament is questionable. While the 1720 campaign to gain a parliamentary act failed, efforts to gain legislation to suppress private slaughterhouses and to regulate their practice were to resurface and in the 1760s the butchers were again the focus of a campaign to remove the slaughterhouses from the City.<sup>48</sup> The only difference was that this later campaign no longer equated the unpleasant sights and smells of waste with disease. However, just as earlier medieval campaigns against slaughterhouses did not permanently eradicate the problem, the eighteenth-century campaigns were similarly unsuccessful, and the problematic presence of slaughterhouses in London persisted into the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup>

As corrupt, stinking flesh and carrion were among the things identified as leading to the miasma that was believed to be the means of transmission and infection of plague, it is not surprising that the butchers received so much ongoing attention. Nor is it surprising that this attention intensified at times when plague threatened the City. In addition to corrupting the external environment of the streets and the City as a whole, the butchers also threatened the health of individuals. Not only were they connected with the breach of fast day prohibitions on meat consumption as an act of atonement for sin, and in doing so encouraging the sin of gluttony, but they were also accused of selling unwholesome food.

### Corrupting the body

Preventing the sale of meat, especially unwholesome meat, intersects with the third and fourth aspects of the plague prevention advice; that is, the connection between food consumption and individual susceptibility to disease indicated in the advice to amend 'evill diet' and correct 'evill humours heaped together in the body, being apt to putrifie, and beget a Fever'.<sup>50</sup> If the build-up of corrupt air allowed the plague to infect the City, not all within the City became infected, and it was believed that it was an imbalance of humours within individual bodies that made an individual susceptible to infection. In 1603 Stephen Hobbes outlined the fourth cause of plague as 'the aptnesse of the body of man, through corrupt and rotten humours fitte to receive the effects of a venomous ayre, putrifying and corrupting the body whereby the pestilence is ingended. And this aptnesse to infection proceedeth by the abuse of the six things which are called by the Phisitions not naturall.'<sup>51</sup> The second of these 'six things' was food and drink. His overall message was one of maintaining balance, exercising

<sup>48</sup> CLRO COL/RMD/RM/01/03/003/9.

<sup>49</sup> P.E. Jones, *The Butchers of London: A History of the Worshipful Company of Butchers of the City of London* (London, 1976), 78–82; I. Maclachlan, 'A bloody offal nuisance: the persistence of private slaughter-houses in nineteenth-century London', *Urban History*, 34 (2007), 227–54.

<sup>50</sup> Sherwood, *The Charitable Pestmaster*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Hobbes, *A New Treatise of the Pestilence*.

moderation in all activities to maintain health.<sup>52</sup> Food consumed could be corruptive or corrupted, and both the quantity and quality of the food consumed was important. In referring to 'evil diet', the health advice texts advocated an avoidance of gluttony, and the observance of fast days thus served the dual function of demonstrating piety and submission to God while also ensuring, at least in theory, moderation in diet to control health. This advice was a constant over the century,<sup>53</sup> though earlier texts made a more overt connection between failure to observe fast provisions and lack of control in diet and likelihood of death. Thomas Cogan (c. 1545–1607) drew the clearest connection, arguing that those failing to observe fish days were 'in contempt of all good order, and as it were despising all kinds of fish, as though God had not created fish for our food as well as flesh, wilfully disorder themselves in this behalfe'.<sup>54</sup> Cogan also argued that forgoing flesh in fasting was advisable as fish was considered less nourishing than flesh, constituting a greater sacrifice, but also ensuring that the advice in Ecclesiasticus, also known as the Book of Sirach, in the Apocrypha was observed, as '[b]y surfeit have many perished: but he that dieteth himselfe prolongeth his life'.<sup>55</sup> It was surfeit, not simply a concern about the quality of supply, that worried Ralph Josselin in his diary entry for 1672 after eating oysters. The remedial action he took of purging the excess through vomiting fitted well with accepted views of dealing with dietary poisons.<sup>56</sup> Gluttony was not just sinful, it was dangerous.

Some health advisors also considered too much fasting harmful. Herring (1636) stated that '[t]ouching our regiment and diet, repletion and inanition (as two dangerous extremities) are heedfully to be avoyded',<sup>57</sup> advising people to

feede three times in the day, but more sparingly than at other times. Shunne variety of dishes at one meale . . . And if at any time the Rule holdeth, The most simple feeding is the most wholesome feeding; then it is in force at this time of infection. *Augenius* (a learned physician) thinketh it not possible that hee that live temperately and soberly, should be subject to the Sicknesse.

<sup>52</sup> Cogan, *Haven of Health*, 307, offered similar advice, urging readers to 'have always in minde, and practice in your life, this short lesson . . . Ayre, labour, food, repletion, / Sleepe, and passions of the minde, / Both much and little hurt a like. / Best is the meane to finde' and (308) if 'excesse be taken in any one of them, there must needes follow great disturbance in our bodies'.

<sup>53</sup> Anon., *The Plagues Approved Physitian Shewing the Naturall Causes of the Infection of the Ayre, and of the Plague. With Divers Observations to Bee Used, Preserving from the Plague, and Signes to Know the Infected Therewith. Also Many True and Approved Medicines for the Perfect Cure Thereof. Chiefely, a Godly and Penitent Prayer unto Almighty God, for Our Preservation, and Deliverance Therefrom* (London, 1665).

<sup>54</sup> Cogan, *Haven of Health*, 160.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, frontispiece.

<sup>56</sup> Wear, 'Perceptions of health', 241.

<sup>57</sup> Herring, *Certaine Rules* (London, 1636).

The anonymous author of *Physicall Directions in Time of Plague Printed by Command from the Lords of Councell* (1644) agreed that while excessive consumption was dangerous, 'Fasting, or much emptinesse is bad' and advised against going 'forth early in the Morning, nor fasting; eat not much, sage and butter, a Potched Egge with Vinegar, or such like will suffice'.<sup>58</sup> Cogan also advised that people needed to have 'eaten or drunken some what' before leaving the house, as 'it is not good to goe forth with empty veins'.<sup>59</sup> The idea was to have some substance in the body to prevent corrupt vapours entering the veins to fill spaces left empty. It was moderation and balance that was aimed at.<sup>60</sup>

Too much food, or the wrong type of food, was a danger, as corruption could take place within the body if unused food was left lying there for too long. Just as surfeit could lead to food putrefying in the stomach, so 'grosser' types of food were less easily absorbed by the body and similarly left the consumer open to corruption. The nature of the disease also influenced ideas of what diet was appropriate as a preventative. As Cogan pointed out, plague was thought to be especially dangerous if 'the body abound with superfluous humours, cheifely with choler and blood', positing a hierarchy of susceptibility based on the natural humoral state of the individual. Sanguine people, whose humoral makeup was hot and wet, were most susceptible, choleric people, who were hot and dry, came next, then phlegmatic people, who were cold and wet, and finally, the least susceptible were melancholics, whose makeup was cold and dry. He reasoned that this was 'because the cold & dry humour is the least apt to inflammation, & putrefaction'.<sup>61</sup> Arguments that were applied to the environment about conditions that led to miasma were thus in microcosm applied to the internal state of an individual.

The focus of treatment was to balance an individual's natural humoral propensity and to avoid consumption of those things likely artificially to exaggerate or to create a hot, moist humoral makeup in the body. In plague dietary regimens, food that was easily absorbed was recommended over the 'grosser' foods, which did not digest easily or engendered too much heat during digestion. While not all food groups were viewed uniformly and an individual's makeup could alter what foods were safe or dangerous to consume, in general, as meat, particularly beef was construed as heating and engendering blood while fish was construed as cooling, the insistence on the observance of fish days during plague periods made sense within early modern medical theory.<sup>62</sup> Correctives such as the 'sauce sower, sharpe, sorrel, Lemon, Vinegar, Verjuyce, &c.' recommended in

<sup>58</sup> Anon, *Physicall Directions in Time of Plague. Printed by Command from the Lords of Councell* (Oxford, 1644).

<sup>59</sup> Cogan, *Haven of Health*, 310.

<sup>60</sup> Slack, *Impact of Plague*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Cogan, *Haven of Health*, 309.

<sup>62</sup> K. Albala, *Eating Right in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 2002), 68.

*Physicall Directions in Time of Plague* in 1644 would temper the meat.<sup>63</sup> Muffett gave sauces to go with meat types if digestion was slow, and in 'sawces for temperate meats' outlined that these were: pork, mutton, lamb, veal kid, hen, capon, pullet, chicken, rabbit, partridge and pheasant. He recommended temperate sauces that were not too hot or cold 'for if their sawces should be either too cold or too hot, such meats would soon corrupt our stomachs, being otherwise most nourishing of their own nature'.<sup>64</sup> It is curious that Muffett gave no qualification to the consumption of pork as the Butchers' Company ordinances, ratified in 1607, indicate it was considered 'very dangerous to the health of man and a greate increase of sicknes' during 'the hot tymes and seasons of the yeaere', and therefore prohibited butchers from killing, putting to sale or selling any pork within the City between 1 May and 31 October each year.<sup>65</sup>

When even 'sweet' clean foods could be corruptive to the consumer, consumption of corrupted meat posed an even greater danger. As already discussed, the butchers were often the only traders specifically mentioned in the orders for the regulation of the markets. The most frequent charges against them were the presentments and indictments for attempting to sell corrupted or unwholesome meat. While an examination of the health texts shows that even 'sweet' meat could be considered unwholesome if it unbalanced the eater's humoral makeup, the term 'unwholesome' when used in court records is often accompanied by the words 'corrupt', 'putrid', 'stinking', 'carrion', 'murrain', 'measled' and 'naughty' indicating another level of concern about the quality of the food altogether. The butchers were singled out in the market orders to be specifically searched for corrupt meat.

The surviving documents for Smithfield Markets include a warrant from August 1630 against the sale of meat by hawkers. It appointed dedicated searchers to seize suspect meat and present the hawkers to the Guildhall.<sup>66</sup> Again, despite the Butchers' Company charter, it was felt necessary to appoint independent searchers. The Leet Court records for Southwark show presentments for the King's and Guildable manors for 1620 and 1624 of butchers selling unwholesome flesh, and keeping hogs. For 1634 and 1638 the presentments add a further offence of butchers hanging meat out of stalls to obstruct the streets. These types of charge are repeated in the booklets for 1648, 1652 and 1654; and in the records for the Guildable manor for Southwark 1660–79 similar charges appear with the addition in 1665/66 and afterwards of sales of carrion beef, mutton and veal (1666/67), and stinking calves, measled and blown pork (1670/71).<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Anon., *Physicall Directions in Time of Plague*. See also Thomas Muffett, *Healths Improvement: Or, Rules Comprizing and Discovering the Nature, Method, and Manner of Preparing All Sorts of Food Used in this Nation* (London, 1655), 256.

<sup>64</sup> Muffett, *Healths Improvement*, 257.

<sup>65</sup> A. Pearce, *The History of the Butchers' Company* (London, 1929), 233, Appendix 2, item 56.

<sup>66</sup> CLRO CLA/017/LC/05/001.

<sup>67</sup> CLRO CLA/043/01/009 and CLA/043/01/010.

While the Southwark records are the most detailed in recording food trade transgressions, the Westminster Sessions rolls for the 1620s show similar accusations. Although the Westminster records for the period often failed to identify what recognizances and indictments were for,<sup>68</sup> it is possible to identify some cases from the period 1619 to 1629 where these details were recorded. In these cases the accusations were similar to those at Southwark, though in a couple of cases the charge of trying to sell murrained flesh was added to the list.<sup>69</sup> The Repertories of the Court of Aldermen also show concerns about the butchers, and the Journals of the Court of Common Council for the City of London reflect these concerns in orders regarding the well ordering of the markets.<sup>70</sup>

It is rare for the records to discuss the quantities involved but a few of the records do indicate that at least some of these attempts were on a fairly large scale. Certainly on 20 September 1624 George Pascall, a butcher from Putney, was indicted for putting to sale 'six stones of putrid, unmerchantable and unwholesome beef' in the Westminster Market. He was accused of doing this 'to [the] great danger of infection to the King's subjects', an addition of wording not found in many of the other indictments.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, William Pratt, a butcher from Finchley, was also indicted in 1624 for trying to sell 'ten quareters of putrid unwholesome meet in the open market, at St Margaret's Westminster'.<sup>72</sup> Pratt was found guilty, fined and remanded for good behaviour. Neither the punishments meted out nor the processes of prosecution appear to have been uniform. Pratt was fined, but another butcher, Richard Bond, was referred to the King's Bench after his case was declared 'true bill' by the Grand Jury in 1621.<sup>73</sup> Bond appears in three records for 1621 and 1622 with his address variously given as St Margaret's Westminster and Field Lane in the Parish of St Andrews Holborn. He was bound by recognizance in January 1621 for trying to sell 'unlawful and unwholesome flesh in Westminster market' but defaulted, and was indicted in 22 December 1621 for putting 'putrid and unwholesome beef' up for sale. His indictment was upheld and he was referred to the King's Bench, but in January 1621/22 he was again up on recognizance for abusing one of the 'sworn searchers for flesh' for Westminster.<sup>74</sup> There is no record of the outcome of this accusation. The

<sup>68</sup> For further discussion on the limitations and uses of recognizance and indictment records, see R.B. Shoemaker, 'Using Quarter Sessions records as evidence for the study of crime and criminal justice', *Archives*, 20, no. 90 (1993), 145–57.

<sup>69</sup> LMA WJ/SR(NS)1/009 and /011; WJ/SR(NS)3/064, /109, /111; WJ/SR(NS)5/002, /016, /106; WJ/SR(NS)10/95; WJ/SR(NS)11/36 and /38; WJ/SR(NS)21/133; WJ/SR(NS)25/61.

<sup>70</sup> CLRO, Repertories of the Court of Aldermen: COL/CA/01/01/060 fols. 62 and 86b, /063 fols. 69, 81 210, /065 fols. 50 and 93, /068 fol. 63, /069 fol. 259b, /076 fol. 156, /119 fols. 11–15; Journals: COL/CC/01/01/027 e.g. pp. 320v–322, /041 pp. 196v–198v, /044 p. 197, /50 pp. 59–60v and 92–3.

<sup>71</sup> LMA WJ/SR(NS)11/38.

<sup>72</sup> LMA WJ/SR(NS)11/36.

<sup>73</sup> LMA WJ/SR(NS)5/106.

<sup>74</sup> LMA WJ/SR (NS)5/002.



difference in treatment between his case and Pratt's may have been due to a perception that he was of greater danger. Certainly his behaviour does nothing to contradict images in popular literature of 'bold, battring, Beefe-braining Butchers'.<sup>75</sup> Several of the other cases were declared 'ignoramus' (no case to answer), though whether this is due to a lack of evidence against them, or a failure of witnesses to present is not indicated.

While the singling out of the butchers in the orders and laws of the City is perhaps not surprising given their presence in the court records of prosecution, it is interesting that the fishmongers did not warrant similar concerns. The 1636 'Orders for Health' issued by the College of Physicians listed stinking fish, unwholesome flesh, musty corn and other corrupt fruits as items to be searched for and avoided as part of the actions to keep the streets clean and sweet, and the minutes for the Fishmongers' Court of Assistants show ongoing presentments of fishmongers for sales of stinking and corrupt fish and orders for search, making them similarly culpable of polluting the air with the stench of corruption, yet fishmongers did not attract the same generalized representation as butchers.<sup>76</sup> The relative impact of slaughtering and dismembering animals for sale, and the scale of detritus produced, would have been a major factor, but other differences also affected perceptions of the trades. The connection of fish consumption with pious behaviour – it was the food of fasting – was one such factor. In addition, the Fishmongers' Company prosecuted their own members within the company court rather than pursuing prosecutions in the more general courts, thus maintaining a more respectable public presence. It may also have been the multiplicity of the issues relating to the Butchers as a threat that influenced the way they were treated. Whatever the reason, and despite the fact that both fishmongers and butchers were accused of similar bad practice, it was the butchers who were identified as potentially dangerous to the City and its populace.

### Conclusion

According to early modern understandings of disease and its prevention, the butchers' trade was implicated in almost all aspects of the problem of plague. Like all food trades except the fishmongers' trade, it was associated with the sin of gluttony and of leading people away from proper acts of repentance by tempting them to break the fast day prohibitions and placing the City at risk of divine displeasure. In addition, blood and offal from the slaughterhouses and dung from livestock contributed to the corruption

<sup>75</sup> Taylor, *Lack a Lent*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Royal College of Physicians of London, *Certain Necessary Directions*; Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, *Records of the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers: Calendar to the Minute Books (1592–1699)*, e.g. vol. IV: 1646–64, 109–10, 598–9, 991–2, 995, 1005, 1065–7, 1226–7, 1476; vol. V, 228, 250–1, 371–2, 486–7, 513, 533–4. This is an ongoing issue in the Company minutes with searches appearing to take place sporadically when the company officers were pushed to search by the actions of those members actually engaged in the trade.

of the air, inviting infection to corrupt the City and its populace. Thirdly, the consumption of meat, as opposed to fish, threatened to unbalance the humoral constitution of individuals, inviting infection from plague. Finally, the sale of dubious meat led to the corruption of the humours and weakened the bodies of individuals, exposing them to greater risk of infection and depleting their ability to fight off disease. Control of the food trades came under the aegis of public health, and the strategies taken reflected early seventeenth-century theories of health. In presenting the City's success in suppressing illegal meat sales and consumption on designated fast days, the lord mayor and aldermen of London were making a case for their effectiveness in dealing with plague. Restraining the food trades was therefore not only about economic regulation, but also about environmental control, a strategy for the protection of the morals and health of the body of the City, and of its citizens.