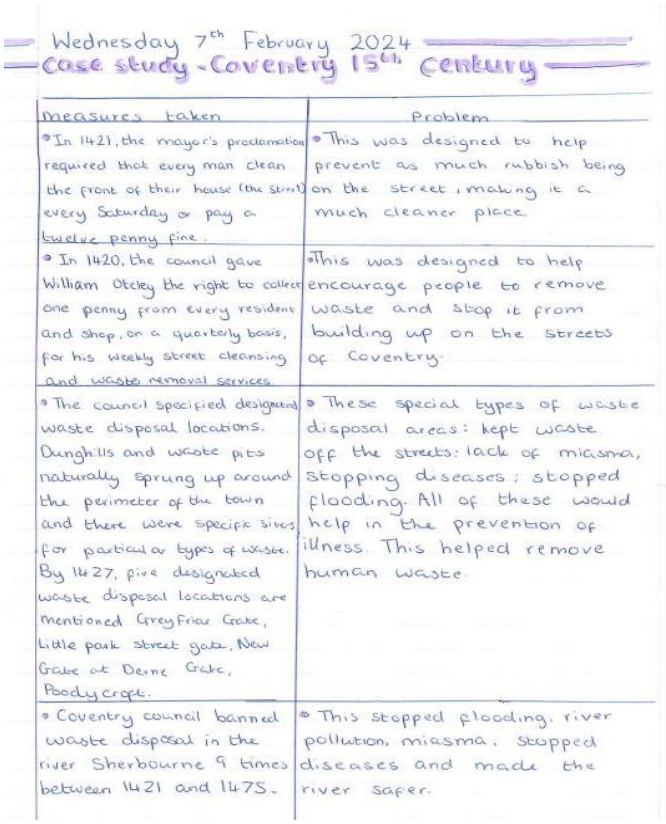
Lower 5 study health in Medieval urban and monastic sites



Wednesday 7th February 2024

Case study - Coventry 15th century

Measures taken	Problem
• In 1421, the mayor's proclamation required that every man clean the front of their house (the street) every Saturday or pay a twelve penny fine.	• This was designed to help prevent as much rubbish being on the street, making it a much cleaner place.
• In 1420, the council gave William Otley the right to collect one penny from every resident and shop, on a quarterly basis, for his weekly street cleansing and waste removal services.	• This was designed to help encourage people to remove waste and stop it from building up on the streets of Coventry.
• The council specified designated waste disposal locations. Dunghills and waste pits naturally sprung up around the perimeter of the town and there were specific sites for particular types of waste. By 1427, five designated waste disposal locations are mentioned Greyfriar Gate, Little park street gate, New Gate at Derne Gate, Poodycroft.	• These special types of waste disposal areas: kept waste off the streets: lack of miasma, stopping diseases; stopped flooding. All of these would help in the prevention of illness. This helped remove human waste.
• Coventry council banned waste disposal in the river Sherbourne 9 times between 1421 and 1475.	• This stopped flooding, river pollution, miasma, stopped diseases and made the river safer.

The pupils of Lower 5 have continued their GCSE course on the history of medicine by examining public health in the Medieval period. This has involved dispelling the myth that Medieval people and their dwellings were inevitably filthy and unhygienic. Pupils investigated the town of Coventry in the 15th century and found robust and sophisticated laws and ordinances that discouraged irresponsible waste disposal and punished offenders.

Lower 5 then switched from an urban to a monastic case study. They investigated the site of Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire which is quite familiar to many of the pupils. They looked into the location, construction and layout of the abbey and how its design was intended to encourage good health. Moreover, pupils looked into the sophisticated system of piping that delivered clean water and the herb gardens that provided medicinal plants.

These studies will enable the pupils to compare and contrast the state of public health across several different historical periods.

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