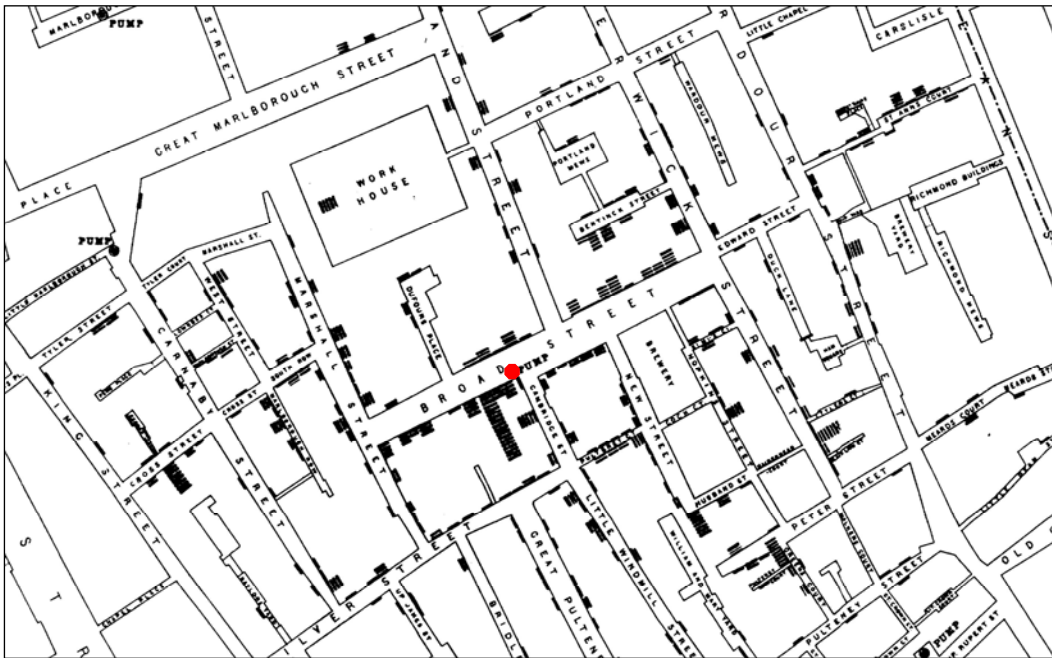


THE TIME of CHOLERA

A Case Study About Historical Context

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London's cholera epidemic of 1854 is best known as the story of Dr. John Snow, the Broad Street water pump and a map. Snow made medical history by tracing the deadly outbreak to the pump. He then mapped the deaths so effectively that common misunderstandings about the disease were debunked. The usual telling of events, however, overlooks an important element. Who were the people who died? Names were omitted from accounts written at the time, Snow's map renders each fatality as a nameless black line, while recent books have largely made do with scanty details.

Harriet (Walter) Iddiols was born in London, England, in 1820 and died of cholera in 1854 after drinking from the Broad Street pump. This webinar describes the context brought to Harriet's life when a descendant set out to identify the forgotten victims of John Snow's map.



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What is historical context?

Births, marriages and deaths are the bare bones of family history. Context includes the setting against which those events occurred, the fabric against which an ancestor's life played out. Because it existed then—not now—it's *historical* context. Without it we cannot truly appreciate an ancestor's experience in the world.

To be meaningful, historical context must be relevant to the life of the ancestor. It cannot be drawn from canned timelines oblivious to an individual's particular circumstances, and it does not refer to faraway events that did not affect them. It may be similar for some ancestors but it will not be the same for all. The best results can come from exploring what is most unique about a person's life.

Genealogical standard 73 addresses this issue: "Genealogies, pedigrees, lineages, and most other genealogical writing include descriptive biographical narrative besides any vital statistics. These details include sufficient information about each person's or family's activities, residences, circumstances, contributions, and lifestyle to identify them uniquely within the context of their historical era, society, and geographic place."¹

Well-known genealogist Helen Leary once said an ancestor's life can be influenced by family context, neighborhood context and historical context.² Depending on the specifics of a particular individual's life, one type of context may be more relevant, more important, or more open to exploration than another. "The Time of Cholera" looks at the broader context of Harriet's death then digs down to examine the neighborhood.

Sources used in this investigation include standard genealogical fare such as census returns, parish registers, civil registration certificates, city directories and poor rate records. It includes written accounts by John Snow, a parish priest, an engineer, members of the board of health and various municipal officials charged with investigating the cholera outbreak in which Harriet died. It also includes modern-day accounts of the epidemic and a modern-day work on London architecture.

¹ Board for Certification of Genealogists, *Genealogy Standards*, 2nd ed. revised (Nashville, Tenn: Ancestry.com, an imprint of Turner Publishing, 2021), p. 40.

² Helen F. M. Leary "Historical Background' Versus Context." *OnBoard*, newsletter of the Board for Certification of Genealogists, January 2001, p. 1.

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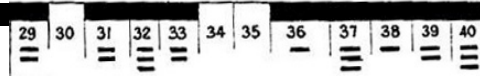
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