

Malaria

From 1564 the health of the Marsh population suffered from malaria, then known as ague or marsh fever, which caused high mortality rates until the 1730s. It remained a major problem until the completion of the Royal Military Canal in 1806, which greatly improved the drainage of the area. Mortality rates on the Marsh were twice as high as in villages just a few miles away.

This disease probably arrived here as soon as the weather became warm enough after the end of the last glacial, around or before the time of the Roman occupation. The strain responsible was most probably *Plasmodium vivax*, as records and texts describe agues or fevers at three or four-day intervals. Prior Anselm, of nearby Canterbury, recorded in 1070s and 1080s a case that had every appearance of malaria.

With five indigenous mosquito species capable of being hosts for the malarial parasite, only the *Anopheles atroparvus* species (pictured) breeds in sufficient numbers here to act as an efficient vector. However, *P. vivax* likes brackish waters and with the recreation of the old coastal wetlands coming into favour, this could expand the future malarial parasite host reserve still further. Therefore, together with this and the average temperatures in England increasing again, it may be possible to see English malaria successfully re-establish in the marshes.

