



CHURCH HISTORY: THE ENGLISH REFORMATION



INFORMATION

WHAT WAS THE ENGLISH REFORMATION?

In the 16th century, the **Church of England** separated from the **Catholic Church** and no longer accepted the authority of the **Pope in Rome**. The Protestant movement began with **Martin Luther** and **John Calvin** in Germany and France, with **Protestant** churches becoming established there and elsewhere in Europe, including Hungary, Scotland and Switzerland.

The process of reformation in England was begun by **King Henry VIII** in 1529 and formally completed by **Queen Elizabeth I** in 1559.



King Henry VIII

WHAT ROLE DID HENRY VIII PLAY?

There is a common belief that the Reformation took place solely because the Pope refused to allow **Henry VIII** to divorce. However, this is only a small part of what happened.

The **Protestant** religion had already gathered widespread political and popular support, as it challenged Catholic practices such as selling pardons, which were widely regarded as corrupt, and sought to reduce the level of power and control invested in church figures, focusing on helping believers to create a more direct relationship with God.

When Henry's request for an annulment of his marriage was turned down by **Pope Clement VII**, he summoned parliament to deal with the annulment, bringing together those who wanted reform. This started the process and in 1534 the **Acts of Supremacy** made Henry Supreme Head of the Church of England.

However, when Henry's Catholic daughter **Mary I** became queen in 1553, she repealed the Reformation legislation and tried to achieve a reunion with Rome. She became known as "**Bloody Mary**" when she ordered 283 Protestants to be burnt at the stake for heresy. She died childless in 1558.



Queen Mary I

WHEN WAS THE REFORMATION COMPLETED?

Elizabeth was Mary's half sister and when she ascended to the throne, she summoned parliament to create a new church. She could not be **Catholic** as the Pope did not recognise her as **Queen of England**. Under Catholic rules she was considered illegitimate, since they claimed Henry VIII's marriage to her mother was not valid.

In 1559 Parliament passed the **Act of Supremacy**, confirming Elizabeth as the **Supreme Governor of the Church of England**.



Queen Elizabeth I



A bird's-eye view reconstruction of the Faversham Abbey complex as it was before dissolution, by Jack Salmon. St Mary of Charity with its two towers can be seen top right.



The remains of Faversham Abbey in the 18th century after most of it had been demolished

WHAT WAS THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES?

Between 1536 and 1541 **Henry VIII** disbanded the monasteries, priories, convents and friaries in England, Wales and Ireland, taking their income and disposing of their assets. This included Faversham Abbey which was dissolved and soon the buildings were almost entirely demolished. The rubble went over to the English **Pale of Calais** (a region of France) to reinforce its defences. Henry was given the authority to do this in England and Wales by the **Act of Supremacy**, and by the **First Suppression Act** (1536) and the **Second Suppression Act** (1539).

Two thirds of all the land was sold to the laity (non-church people) and much of the money was spent on wars against **France**. The dissolution of the monasteries destroyed thousands of priceless ecclesiastical treasures, but it was a shrewd move politically, as it created a vested interest in **The Reformation**. People now owning monastic lands were unlikely to embrace a return to **Catholicism**.

During the short reign of Henry VIII's son **Edward VI** (1547-1553), the pace of Protestant reform accelerated. The 1539 Act was repealed, priests were permitted to marry - creating another vested interest - and more land was confiscated.

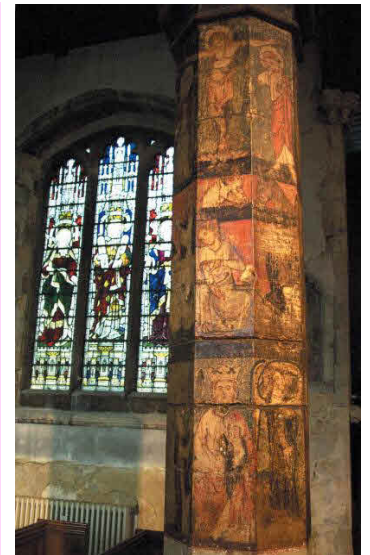
HOW DID THE REFORMATION AFFECT ST MARY OF CHARITY?

After the dissolution of the abbeys at Faversham and Canterbury, **St Mary of Charity church** became more important as the focus of faith in the local area.

Its interior was transformed. Its many altars and 'lights' permanently burning before saints' effigies (statues) were removed, as was almost all its stained glass, even though this had been used to help tell the Bible story to people who could not read or write. **Murals**, used for the same purpose, were destroyed or covered with lime-wash. The great **rood loft**, with its images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and St John, was removed, because Protestants thought images of Holy people were wrong (idolatrous) as they led to people worshipping images or "idols" instead of God. The emphasis was now on ordinary people being able to speak directly to God, and on hearing His Word preached.

For some reason the **painted column** in the north transept was left unharmed, one of the very few of its kind to survive in England. There are other medieval paintings in the church but these are not visible to the public. The **15th-century misericords** in the choir also survived, but the some of the carvings are not religious ones. Some say they came from the Abbey, but it is just as likely they were made for the church.

Almost all the present stained glass dates from between 1860 and 1910. The remains of England's last **Norman** king, **Stephen** (1135-1154) are said to be buried in a canopy tomb without an inscription in the Trinity Chapel. These were originally interred at the Abbey but removed when it was demolished.



The rare medieval column at St Mary of Charity church painted around 1306



King Stephen holding a model of Faversham Abbey

The tomb in St Mary of Charity church where King Stephen's remains are reputed to lie



HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE REFORMATION?

GENERAL LINKS

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/history/detailed-history.aspx>
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/reformation_overview_01.shtml
<http://www.faversham.org/history/Buildings/Abbey.aspx>

ST MARY OF CHARITY/PAINTED COLUMN LINKS

<http://www.stmaryofcharity.org/2.html>
<http://www.builttoinspire.org/exploring/painted-column>
<http://paintedchurch.org/faverpc.htm>