

Notes re: the religious turmoil in England (including Hertfordshire) from the Reformation in 1534 to the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672.

From Henry VIII's break with Rome (1534) and the Elizabethan Settlement (1559) through to the mid-17th century, England was repeatedly reshaped by shifts in church policy and enforcement.

The Elizabethan church sought a Protestant uniformity that many — Puritans, Separatists, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Quakers and recusant Catholics alike — found increasingly intolerable; disputes over liturgy, local patronage, episcopal authority and clerical appointment fed wider political tensions at parish and national levels.

Those religious conflicts were a major element in the crisis of the 1640s and the Civil Wars, and although the Interregnum brought a measure of pluralism and experimentation, it did not produce a durable settlement.

The Restoration reasserted Anglican conformity: the *Clarendon Code* (notably the *Act of Uniformity* 1662, the *Conventicle Act* 1664 and the *Five Mile Act* 1665) made dissent increasingly risky and pushed many congregations into clandestine worship.

Charles II's *Declaration of Indulgence* in 1672 temporarily relaxed enforcement and licensed some meeting-houses, but it proved politically contentious and short-lived — precisely the moment when a house used for nonconformist meetings could acquire lasting historical significance.

(References: Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History*. London: Penguin, 2005; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005; Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967; John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603–1689*. Basingstoke / London: Macmillan / Palgrave, 1998 and Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and His Kingdoms, 1660–1685*. London: Allen Lane, 2005.)

The small hamlet of Preston in Hertfordshire was not untouched by this turmoil. Sir Thomas Sadleir at Temple Dinsley, Preston, was an ardent supporter of the Parliamentarians. He was the grandson of a famous military engineer, Sir Richard Lee, and was part of the Council of War for Hertfordshire, serving on the Committee of the Eastern Association.

When the Royalist army led by Rupert threatened nearby Hitchin in 1643, a force of three to four thousand Trained-Band Volunteers were mobilised which, in view of Sadleir's involvement, may well have included men from Preston. Several of this force were killed in the fields around Hitchin. During the winter of 1643-4, the army was billeted at Hitchin, much to the town's people's annoyance and Sadler was in the party dispatched to Parliament to lobby that their soldiers be removed and that the taxation for their upkeep levied upon Hertfordshire be abandoned. Thomas himself, despite his mansion and 600 acres of land, was no longer able to maintain his son because of these dues.

Also, Crunnells Green at Preston today was formerly known as 'Cromwell's Green', which stands as a monument to its historical relevance. In addition to this, during the 1660s John Bunyan often preached to hundreds of supporters at 'Bunyan's Dell' in Preston. There was also discontent brewing about the hard-line stance of St Marys, Hitchin clerics towards Preston folk for not supporting their parish church, preferring Minsden Chapel and other local Anglican churches.