

A Story from History

It was a sad time in the history of England. The new King, James II was a Roman Catholic. At first James said that he would be kind but sad to say, he was a wicked man and he was soon treating his people cruelly. He tried to force everyone to go the Church of England. The king himself was the head of the Church of England, even though he was a Catholic. Already in Scotland he had tortured and killed people for refusing to attend a church he did not himself believe in!



James II intended to make England a Catholic country. However, the people in those days had read Foxes *Book of Martyrs*. They knew what Catholic kings did to Christians. Things got worse and worse. The true Christians had to start meeting in secret or in the woods and they were always fearful of people reporting them to the King to gain a reward for doing so.

Terrible punishments awaited those who were caught. And so the people of England were very worried, but they thought that if they could put up with James and the bad way he was treating them, then after him would come a good queen. The problem was – how long would they have to wait? They began to think that maybe there was a quicker way to end their days of terror. One brave Scotsman brought together an army in Scotland thinking he could rid the country of James II.



The Duke of Monmouth, gathered together an army in England. In a town called Axminster in Somerset, the local pastor and his congregation were eager for an end to their persecution. Along with many other common folk some of them joined the Duke of Monmouth's band of soldiers. They were only armed with their farming tools – scythes and bill hooks. So desperate were they for freedom, that they do not seem to have stopped to consider whether Monmouth would be a better king than James II or

whether he could be trusted any more than James.

As the band of rebels travelled through Somerset, the people cheered and shouted 'A

Monmouth! The Protestant religion!' At Taunton town they even made him king, but he was not King Monmouth for long.

On the night of 6th July a fierce battle took place on Sedgemoor between the king's men and Monmouth's men. Monmouth and his army fought bravely, but his men were defeated at last and then Monmouth ran away leaving them without a leader. This was the last real battle fought on English ground.

The Pastor and elder of the church at Axminster managed to get home alive, but sadly some others lost their lives. As for Monmouth, he was caught by James II and beheaded. The people of the little church in Axminster did not stop trusting God even though this terrible thing had happened. And they were right to do so. God had someone far better than Monmouth in store for them, someone who had a real right to be king and whose reign would see the beginning of true freedom of religion in England.

Sources:

Marshall, H. E., *Our Island Story*, Galore Park Publishing Ltd./Civitas, London, 2005

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