

Reformation Christian Ministries

U.K. Reformation Report

October 2002

Actions Today Can Impact the Future

In the long medieval 'dark ages' when Roman Catholicism reigned supreme in England, huge Cathedrals were erected and adorned with statues and carvings, whilst the mass of the people were kept in profound ignorance of God's Word and the Biblical plan of salvation. The picture (left) shows Wells Cathedral in the county of Somerset, England, built and enlarged around the site of a primitive Anglo-Saxon Church (AD 900s) and progressively made more elaborate until completion around AD 1300. The face of the building shown contains tiers of niches for life-sized statues of Apostles and Saints, all of which would originally have been painted in bright colored robes, with gilded crowns and life-like flesh and hair colors.

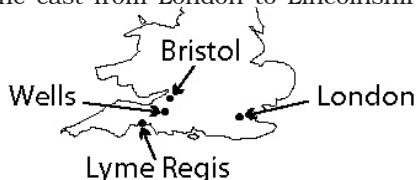


But the 'Protestant' spirit of the pre-Roman Catholic Celtic Church was not extinguished. It lay dormant through all of those dark centuries, flaming out with John Wickliffe and the 'Lollard' proto-protestants from about 1360, and merging into the great and blessed

Reformation of the sixteenth century. Much of the 'imagery' and idolatry' of the Catholic Churches was swept away at the Reformation, but much also survived. The Puritans attempted to move the Churches of England into a more thorough Biblical reformation, but were opposed by both the 'high' Episcopal party, and the Roman Catholics themselves, through the latter sixteenth and most of the seventeenth centuries.

Following the Puritan 'high-water' mark of the time of the Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell, the tide ebbed with the restoration of King Charles II in 1660, the ejecting of 2,000 Puritan pastors from their Churches in 1662, and the start of the persecution of Puritans in England and Covenanters in Scotland. Things took on an even more sinister aspect in 1685, when James II succeeded Charles as king, for James was an open and avowed Roman Catholic, and his accession seemed to threaten the entire Protestant reformation in Britain, and plunge the nation right back into the horrors of Roman darkness. Desperate Protestants, fearing a return to the days of forbidden Bibles, the rack, and martyrs burning at the stake, looked for an alternative to James.

On June 11, 1685, an illegitimate son of Charles II, James Duke of Monmouth, landed with just eighty supporters at Lyme Regis in Dorset, and raised his standard as the champion of Protestantism and liberty of conscience. Monmouth knew that the two great heartlands of Protestantism lay in the English West county, and in the east from London to Lincolnshire. But London and its hinterland was firmly in the king's control, so the attempt must be a 'West Country' affair, with its vital



strategic objective being the city of Bristol, then the second most important city in the realm, and (like London itself) a staunchly Puritan city.

If Monmouth could take Bristol he would gain a base, a great seaport, arsenals of arms and ammunition, and potentially thousands of recruits. With Bristol and the west in his hands, it was likely that London would rise

on his behalf, and the nation saved for the Reformed faith. As Monmouth moved north through the western counties of Dorset



and Somerset, thousands of Protestant peasants and artisans flocked to his standard, but they were untrained, and mainly armed with agricultural implements ('the pitchfork rebellion!'). On their way they encamped at Wells, right here on the Cathedral green. As Protestants and Puritans they took the Biblical commands concerning idolatry and graven images seriously so much so that they pulled down and smashed the medieval statues in the lower niches (note the absences and gaps!) and then used the ones out of reach for musketry target-practice! (See statues lacking faces and generally damaged etc. at lower right.). This was not 'vandalism' (as Anglican guide books would persuade us) but a calculated reaction of indignation against the imagery of Rome—a robust and clear testimony to Protestant and Biblical thinking.

However, King James reacted swiftly, interposing his professional army between Monmouth and Bristol, and the crisis was reached when that army chose to remain loyal to its 'legitimate' (though Catholic) king. Simultaneously a rising against James in Scotland under the Covenanter Earl of Argyll was crushingly defeated.

As news of these factors spread, planned risings in the east and London failed to materialize, and Monmouth's volunteer host of around 5,000 desperate men were left to face the wrath of the King, as they moved slowly back into their heartland of Somerset.

On July 6, 1685, the rebel army, brought to bay by James' professionals, at Sedgemoor, Somerset, attempted to overturn the odds by a surprise dawn attack on the royal army, but the enemy were alerted by a wakeful cavalry scout,



Dr. Stephen P. Westcott



and were found strongly posted behind an irrigation ditch and bank. First the rebel cavalry, then the scythe-wielding peasant infantry charged the enemy to the battle cry of "God with us!" Against the steady and close-range fire of cannon and musketry, the gallant men of Devon, Dorset and Somerset fell in swathes. When they were attacked on both flanks by unbroken royal cavalry, they finally gave way. Fleeing rebels were shown no mercy but cut down in the fields and hedgerows, whilst the wounded were killed where they lay. At the end of the day, over 300 Protestants lay dead on Sedgemoor.

That was just the beginning of King James' revenge. For months prisoners and suspected 'rebels' were rounded up, summarily tried and executed in droves, in all the towns and villages of the West, to terrify the locals. Even those who aided the rebels in any way were not safe: a lady of over seventy years old, Dame Alice Lisle, was executed for giving one night's shelter to a wounded surgeon, who had accompanied Monmouth, and had attended to the wounded of both sides on the battlefield. When the blood thirst slacked, remaining prisoners were mainly sentenced to exile amounting to slavery in the West Indies: some 350 men were shipped out of Bristol and Weymouth to Jamaica, Barbados, and the Leeward islands. Many died of disease en route, and the survivors labored in the fields as a cheap alternative to Negro slaves (some of their descendants are traceable in those islands to this day).

Monmouth himself was captured attempting to flee to Europe, and was beheaded on Tower Green London, on July 15, 1685.

Was the rebellion a total and bloody failure, and

Was the rebellion a total and bloody failure, and the lives thrown tragically away? The answer lies in 300 years of unbroken Protestantism in Britain after that event.



James Duke of Monmouth

the lives thrown tragically away? The answer lies in 300 years of unbroken Protestantism in Britain after that event. The people of the West reacted to the sufferings of the rebels by a firmer faith than ever, and all of Monmouth's volunteers who escaped immediate capture melted into the local populace and were never betrayed to royal informers (on a personal note, I am pleased to say that no less than four Westcotts (James, John, Richard and Samuel, all of Somerset) were sought for as having been 'out with Monmouth', but none were ever captured), whilst the whole nation was sickened by the merciless brutality of James.

Just three years later, on November 5, 1688, another Protestant champion, a more legitimate one this time and far better armed, William of Orange, also landed in the West country at Torbay, his flagship flying a banner inscribed "The Liberties of England and the Protestant religion, I will Maintain." This time the army and people flocked to his standard, and James fled to

Catholic Europe without a fight. It was the 'glorious revolution'. But it had been founded in the blood and sacrifice of the men of '85, the 'pitchfork rebels' who attempted to push a king off his throne, because he had defied the greater King, Jesus.

Their monument lies in Parliamentary democracy, the freedom to preach the Gospel, in a bronze plate on a wall overlooking a flat and empty Somerset field: "To the Glory of God and in memory of all those who doing the right as they saw it fell in the battle of Sedgemoor, 6th July, 1685, and lie buried in this field, or who for their share in the fight suffered death, punishment, or transportation. PRO PATRIA," and, not least, in the mute witness of the toppled and bullet-defaced Romanist idols, that every tourist sees on the face of the great Cathedral at Wells to this day.

Stephen P. Westcott Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset, England

To: Reformation Christian Ministries

E-MAIL: gwd@reformation.edu
WEB: <http://www.reformation.ws>

October 2002

U.S.A.: 13950 - 122nd Street • Fellsmere, FL 32948-6411 • Phone (772) 571-8833 • Fax (772) 571-8010
CANADA: RR#1, 5060 Oliver Road • Murillo, ON P0T 2G0 • Phone (807) 473-9344 • canada@reformation.edu

Internet connection:
 High Speed
 Dial-Up

Name: _____ Telephone #: _____

Street Address: _____ E-Mail: _____

City: _____ State/Prov.: _____ Zip /Post Cd: _____

Please send e-mail updates from RCM to (e-mail address): _____ Country: _____

I am interested in staying on your newsletter list. Please remove my name from your newsletter list.

Send me the following Newsletters and/or E-mail updates for:

Russia Report Italy Report Poettckers: Prayer Partners (SALT) Albania Report U.K. Reformation Report

Send me the following Fact Sheets/Catalogs:

An Introduction to R.C.M. Albania Fact Sheet Suriname/Guyana Fact Sheet
 International Office Fact Sheet Russia Fact Sheet Kitchen Table Mission Stations
 The Great Commission, RCM & You Italy Fact Sheet Foreign Language Literature Catalog
 RCM Catalog (books, tapes, courses) (Russian, Italian, Albanian, Chinese, Czech, Spanish)

Enclosed is a contribution of \$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 \$500 \$ _____

METHOD OF DONATION: I plan to contribute per mo. qtr. year

Check or money order is enclosed payable to REFORMATION CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES

Credit card donations, call 772-571-8833 STOCK DONATIONS: Contact Rev. Geoff Donnan.

I would like to designate my donation for: \$ _____ HQ Needs \$ _____ Student Sponsorship Program

\$ _____ Albania \$ _____ Congo-Zambia \$ _____ Good News Bible Study Ministries

\$ _____ China \$ _____ SALT \$ _____ RCM Construction Debt

\$ _____ Italy \$ _____ Russia \$ _____ H.E.A.R. Ye! Other _____

Contact me about working on the RCM Advisory Board I would like to teach at C.L.A. in Suriname.

I would like to assist with the college and/or seminary program. I am sending a resume.

Please add this/these person(s) on your newsletter/e-mail list: