

1558-Elizabeth I. The religious roundabout keeps on turning.

Elizabeth's attitude to religion was different to the last two monarchs. She thought that extreme religious beliefs adversely affected the stability of the country and her attitude was based on what she thought was 'good for the country', not with religious dogma.

When Parliament declared her to be Supreme Governor of the Church of England the break with Rome was final.

An Act of Uniformity made church attendance compulsory. No doubt for many the 'new church' was a welcome relief!

By 1561 all churches were required to follow the revised Book of Common Prayer. However, a Bible-based Protestantism developing in Suffolk was causing political concern. The desire for freedom of worship according to conscience was seen as a political threat and serious attempts were made to suppress these ideas. Puritans John Copping and Elias Thacker from Bury St. Edmunds were executed. Later, in 1584, over 50 Suffolk ministers were suspended because of their refusal to conform and some Protestants chose to worship secretly in small groups. It's possible that Lakenheath had an early Nonconformist group. Wealthy Roman Catholics also worshiped secretly and provided shelter for travelling priests, an extremely risky thing to do.

To ensure 'political correctness' preachers had to be licenced before they could preach their own sermons which had to conform to the new forms of service. Un-licenced preachers could only read out officially approved sermons.

Later people who did not accept the Church of England liturgy became known as 'non-conformists' or 'independents'. There were by now a considerable number of Puritan protestants in Suffolk.

In 1566 immigrant weavers from Holland, fleeing religious persecution, began arriving in Suffolk first settling in Ipswich. They brought new skills and equipment which began to produce superior cloth and this came to be preferred over the traditional Suffolk Broadcloth. They also brought with them a strongly Protestant conviction.

Elizabeth was excommunicated by the Pope, effectively declaring war on England and so encouraging invasion.

Wikipedia
St. Edmundsbury Chronicle 2000
History. Com Scaff
'Nonconformist Ancestors'. Suffolk Records Office.

The Spanish Threat and the Armada.

For years following Elizabeth's excommunication invasion by Catholic Spain had been feared and rumours of plots spread throughout the country.

1588- The King of Spain aimed to return England to Roman Catholicism and there had been tension for years between the two countries. This was not helped by the pillaging of Spanish treasure ships returning from Mexico and South America by English privateers.

Invasion was in the air. Signal beacons were placed around the coast and local Militias were put on guard. To be a Catholic was to risk the accusation of spying and treason. When it came the Armada was defeated largely by better gunnery and the violent storms in the North Sea. The threat from Spain had a long- lasting effect and distrust of Catholics continued for many years.



Silver sixpence from the reign of Elizabeth I found on RabbitHill Field