

## EDWARD VI

### RELIGIOUS AND ECONOMIC PROTEST

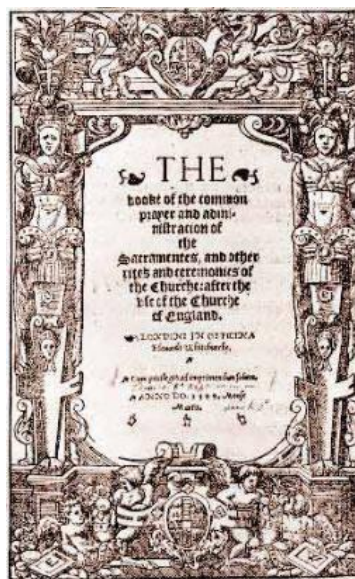
#### THE PRAYER BOOK REBELLION AND KETT'S REBELLION

##### Religious Protest: The Prayer Book Rebellion, 1549.

Cranmer's **Book of Common Prayer**, published in 1549, moved the Church of England away from the Catholic Church and established it as a very Protestant Church. An act of Parliament called **The Act of Uniformity** made it law for this new prayer book to be used in all English churches from the end of May, 1549.

The changes made by the prayer book got a mixed reaction. Some priests refused to have anything to do with the new Church services and continued to run services in Latin! Other, more Protestant minded priests tore out the statues and furniture of their churches without hesitation. Opinion across the country was divided.

The people of Devon and Cornwall were particularly angry at these changes. The Cornish, particularly the purer Cornish-speaking people of the west, were fanatically attached to the Roman Church. Superstitious and therefore conservative, they feared change and the unknown. The Prayer Book and the Act of Uniformity stated that all new services should be in English. But most people in Cornwall did not speak English, they spoke Cornish-Gaelic! A call to translate the Prayer Book into Cornish was rejected.



*The cause of unrest. The Title page of Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer, 1549*

The situation was made worse by a government agent called William Brody who was sent to Devon and Cornwall to make sure that the new Prayer Book was followed. He gave the impression that the valuables that would be removed from churches were to be confiscated by the government. When he got to Cornwall, an angry mob set upon him and murdered him! One ringleader stated that the people of Devon and Cornwall would only obey the religion that was set out by Henry VIII.

This religious anger was made worse because people were suffering under the huge taxes that had to be paid to fund the army in Scotland. The protest soon became a rebellion and an army of ordinary people captured the city of Exeter in Devon.

An army was rushed to the West Country. Most of the soldiers were mercenaries (professional soldiers that came from Germany and Italy). After a series of small battles and a six-week siege of Exeter, the rebels were defeated in August 1549. 4000 rebels were killed in Exeter. A smaller rebellion in Oxfordshire was crushed easily and discontented priests were hanged from their own church spires as an example to all. Five of the leaders of the rebellion in Cornwall and Devon were taken to London and hanged, drawn and quartered.

**MEANWHILE... there were further protests and rebellion elsewhere ...**

## **Economic and Religious Protest: Kett's Rebellion, 1549.**

While Somerset and the government had their hands full dealing with the Prayer Book rebellion, another violent protest broke out in Norfolk where religion was not the only cause of trouble that summer.

Throughout Henry VIII's reign there had been widespread enclosure (fencing in) of farmland so that it could be used to keep sheep. Many landlords preferred sheep farming because the wool could be sold to make cloth. The English cloth trade was booming and there were good profits to be made. Flocks of sheep replaced fields of corn in many parts of the country, especially in the south, the midlands and East Anglia. Fewer workers were needed to look after livestock than to farm crops. This meant that many agricultural workers became unemployed. This was very difficult, especially as the price of food and rents for housing were beginning to rise quickly. Taxation was also high to pay for the Scottish war. Fewer arable crops were being grown and the price of basic foodstuffs began to rise quickly.

This situation continued into Edward's reign. Landlords began to fence in common land to farm more sheep. Although they owned this land, the ancient feudal rights of the common still remained and many poorer people had nowhere to graze their own animals. Young King Edward spoke out against this enclosure of common land. Somerset had tried to help people by placing a tax on sheep in an attempt to prevent landowners from extending their sheep farming. But this did not prevent protest.

Unrest over enclosures was fueled by the opposition to the new Prayer Book and in Norfolk small groups of agricultural workers began to tear down the fences that had been placed on common land. One landowner whose fences were smashed was a man called Robert Kett. He began as one of the targets for the protestors, but he soon became their leader.

The rebellion grew and 15,000 protestors marched to Norwich (the biggest town in Norfolk) and fought against royal soldiers in the town. Unusually for a peasant rebellion, Kett imposed strict discipline on his forces and put an end to the violence when he arrived. He had his followers set up camp on Mousehold Heath outside Norwich for six weeks. It seemed as if the rebels were now content to protest peacefully.

Somerset had problems dealing with this rebellion. He already had troops in Devon and Cornwall and soldiers in Scotland. He was slow to act against them and he was criticised by John Dudley, the Earl of Warwick and Somerset's ambitious rival on the Royal Council. Dudley took command of 1500 foreign mercenary soldiers that landed on the south coast and marched them to Norfolk instead of Scotland, their initial destination. On his march northwards, Dudley collected other royal soldiers and by the time they reached Norwich, his army numbered 13,000.



*A contemporary woodcut showing what the mercenary soldiers used by Dudley may have looked like.*



*Do not make fun of this man. He is a typical German mercenary soldier. They were famous for their flamboyant dress, a style known as "Puff and Slash". They were also noted for their rough treatment of civilian populations. The English government hired many hundreds of such soldiers to fight against the Scots and crush the rebellions of 1549.*

On his arrival, Dudley offered the rebels a pardon, but Kett refused because he said that they were not rebels. He stated that they were not rebelling against the authority of the king but against unjust landlords who were enclosing land causing hardship. Dudley attacked the rebels regardless. Three thousand were killed and 300 were captured and executed in Norwich. The rebellion was crushed and Dudley returned to London.

Robert Kett was imprisoned and later hanged from the battlements of **Norwich Castle**.



*Norwich castle surrounded by the modern city of Norwich.*

What were the consequences of Kett's rebellion?

- 300 executions including Kett's
- The rebellion was broken up
- In future, the government took care to control the amount of land enclosed but they did not stop it
- Dudley returned to London and used Somerset's failure to deal with this crisis and the problems with the Prayer book rebellion as a reason to plot against him. He told the council that neither rebellion would have taken place if he had been Lord Protector
- Faced with the problems in Scotland, the rebellions, rising prices and high taxation, the Royal Council forced Somerset to resign