

Scrooby Separatist Church

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The Separatists were devout Christians who did not support some of the fundamental principles of the Established Church (Church of England), such as a hierarchy of archbishops and bishops and the wearing of clerical vestments.

Unlike the Puritans, who hoped to reform the Established Church from within, the Separatists believed that they could only bring about what they required by separating from the Established Church and re-organising themselves independently.

Naturally, there was a good deal of opposition to the Separatists from the Established Church and the State, particularly after the accession of James I in 1603, and meetings had to be held in secret.

Many of the leading religious non-conformists of the later Sixteenth Century were graduates of Cambridge University, which at that time led the country in radical religious ideas. Some graduates became priests who were later to be deprived of their livings for preaching views contrary to those of the Established Church. Two such priests were John Robinson and Richard Clyfton.

John Robinson was born at Sturton-le-Steeple in about 1576, and was minister of St Andrew's church, Norwich. In the early years of the Seventeenth Century, he became connected with a Separatist Church organised by John Smyth at Gainsborough Old Hall, home of the sympathetic Hickman family, and also with the Scrooby Separatist church.

Richard Clyfton was rector of Babworth from 1586 to 1604, when he resigned his living and took up refuge with William Brewster at Scrooby manor house.

The Scrooby Separatist Church was established by William Brewster at Scrooby manor house in about 1606. Meetings were held in secret to avoid arrest. Principal members were Richard Clyfton, John Robinson and William Brewster. There were also other locals who held similar Separatist views; for example, William Bradford of Austerfield had been orphaned as a child, and lived with Brewster at Scrooby.

By the autumn of 1607, the Established Church authorities had detected the Separatists meeting ironically in the Archbishop of York's manor house. On 30 September 1607, William Brewster resigned as bailiff and postmaster. On 1 December he was cited before the High Court of commission:

Office v William Brewster of Scrowbie, gen. Information is given that he is disobediant in matters of religion. Process served and he gave his word to appear today. Does not appear. Fined twenty pounds, and attachment ordered ...

On 15 December 1607 Richard Jackson of Scrooby and William Brewster were sought by the Ecclesiastical Court for non-appearance. An attachment was awarded to the court officer to apprehend them, "but he certifieth that he cannot finde them, nor understand where they are".