

DISSENT AND RESISTANCE IN PLYMOUTH, 1530-1646

By Mark Stoye (one page summary)

This key-note lecture explored the politico-religious history of Plymouth between 1530 and 1646: two dates which were chosen as the start and end points for the talk because they neatly bracket two major historical events - and to be more specific, two sieges - which have been turning points in Plymouth's history, and which have served both to demonstrate and to perpetuate the town's status as a radical enclave within a generally conservative region. It might well be argued, indeed, that it was during this crucial century that Plymouth's distinctive political identity was first hammered-out - and that that identity owes more to the religious revolution known as the English Reformation than to any other historical event. The lecture did not specifically discuss the voyage of the Mayflower; that subject was left to later, and more knowledgeable, speakers. Instead, the talk sought to place the Mayflower's brief visit to Plymouth within the context of the town's broader politico-religious history: both before and after the celebrated voyage of 1620.

The lecture was divided up into six parts. The first part looked at the late medieval church and at the beginnings of the Reformation in Devon, during the 1520s and 30s. The second part showed how Plymouth responded to the major insurrection against the ongoing religious changes which broke out in Devon in June 1549: the so-called 'Prayer Book Rebellion'. The third part drew on newly discovered evidence in order to tell the dramatic story of how, in July, Plymouth was attacked by the rebels, and some of the townsfolk retreated to the castle, where they subsequently held out for over a month until they were relieved by loyalist forces. The fourth part sketched-out religious developments in Plymouth between 1550 and 1640, and looked, in particular, at the rise of an increasingly assertive puritan faction in the town. The fifth part considered Plymouth's experiences during the English Civil War of 1642-1646: a conflict which saw the town as a whole undergoing a far more long-lasting, destructive and bloody series of sieges than it had undergone in 1549. The sixth and last part of the lecture drew out some general conclusions and attempted to characterise the politico-religious culture which had grown up in Plymouth by the time that the Civil Wars drew to an end.

Sources:

F. Rose Troup, *The Western Rebellion of 1549* (London, 1913).

R.N. Worth, 'The Siege of Plymouth: A Chapter of Plymouth History Re-Written', *Report and Transactions of the Plymouth Institution*, 5 (1874-75), p250-309.

<http://www.plymouthathenaeum.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Trans-1874-75-v2.pdf>

M. Stoye, *Plymouth in the Civil War* (Devon Archaeology, no. 7, Exeter, 1998)

<http://www.devonarchaeologicalsociety.org.uk/devon-archaeology/>

Image:

The Plymouth siege map, by Wenceslaus Hollar, 1643/44

(NB: many versions of this famous woodcut can be found on Google Images)