

The Story of the Episcopal Church

Part 2

The Church in Scotland, established in 1560 at the Reformation not only wished to 'purify' worship but set out, with the help of the lay authorities, to 'purify' the morals and behaviour of its members. In England these people became known as Puritans.

The Town Council of Edinburgh passed laws restricting activities on the Sabbath. Their purpose was to ensure that everyone attended the sermons held in the morning and afternoon. Thus in 1586 they issued the rule:

- no booths (market stalls) to be open on the Sabbath

- no work to be done at any time of day
- no markets to be held

(later this was extended to Monday as many from distant country areas had to set out on the Sabbath.)

- no taverns to be open for the selling of wine and ale
- no cooks to sell food during the time of preaching
- no one was allowed to play games

Even during the high point of Episcopal power after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 Church Sessions continued to enforce strict Sabbatarian laws. 'Searchers' patrolled the streets seeking out those people who were breaking the Sabbath. Thus in 1694 Mary Patown was rebuked by South Leith Session for picking kale on the Sabbath. While in England the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I (1560-1625) represented a golden age for the theatre producing playwrights like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. London at this time contained a number of theatres set mainly on the South Bank.

In Edinburgh, even a century later plans to open theatres met with the determined opposition of the Town Council and the clergy. By the middle of the 18th century the strict Presbyterian stranglehold on Scottish society and culture was beginning to relax. However, in 1756 a great scandal occurred when it was discovered that the most successful play of the day –The Tragedy of Douglas- was written by John Home, a Presbyterian clergyman.

John Peacock our Archivist has been researching the history of the Scottish Episcopal Church in Edinburgh. This part appeared in the March 2018 edition of the Sign.