

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS IN ENGLAND

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1534 (Henry VIII) Act of Supremacy – Henry VIII declared ‘supreme head of the Church in England’

1559 (Elizabeth I) Act of Uniformity - banned the Catholic mass – established the Church of England - Elizabeth I declared ‘supreme governor of the Church of England’

1612 (James I) Last person (an Anabaptist) burned for heresy in England

1640s until 1660 (Charles I) Celebration of Christmas banned by the puritan parliament. This predated the puritan Commonwealth!

1661 (Charles II) Corporation Act - provided that no person could be legally elected to any office relating to the government of a city or corporation, unless he had within the previous twelve months received the sacrament of "the Lord's Supper" according to the rites of the Church of England.

1672 (Charles II) Declaration of Indulgence – temporarily relieved penalties on non-conformists

1673 (Charles II) Test Act and Corporation Act - required holders of public office, as well as students at Oxford and Cambridge, to swear an oath upholding the position of the King as ‘head of the Church of England’ denying transubstantiation, and banning Catholics and non-conformists attending religious meetings, punishable by fine or imprisonment

1685 (James II) A short-lived Catholic Toleration Act

1689 (William & Mary) Toleration Act - allowed dissenters to worship in their own chapels and meeting houses, provided these were licensed by Justices of the Peace

1698 (William III) Blasphemy Act - denial of Christianity made punishable with three years imprisonment

1699 (William III) Popery Act - disallowed Catholic schooling, inheritance and purchase of land

1715 (George I) 'Papists Act' - required Catholics to register their names and estates

1722 (George I) Act levied a tax on Catholics

1736 (George II) Witchcraft Act - repealed the laws against witchcraft

1778 (George III) Catholic Relief Act - Catholics allowed to purchase land and join the army

1791 (George III) Catholic Relief Act - gave Catholics freedom of worship and removed other restrictions

1828 (George IV) Repeal of Test and Corporation Acts - removed remaining barriers against dissenters

1829 (George IV) Catholic Emancipation Act - allowed Catholics to sit in Parliament, vote in elections and hold public office

1846 (Victoria) Religious Disabilities Act - removed last restrictions on Catholics, Jews and dissenters

1888 (Victoria) Oath Act - permitted the use of the term 'solemnly affirm' as an alternative to 'swear by almighty God'

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