

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Nottinghamshire and the wider country was troubled by religious conflict as people sought new connections with God.

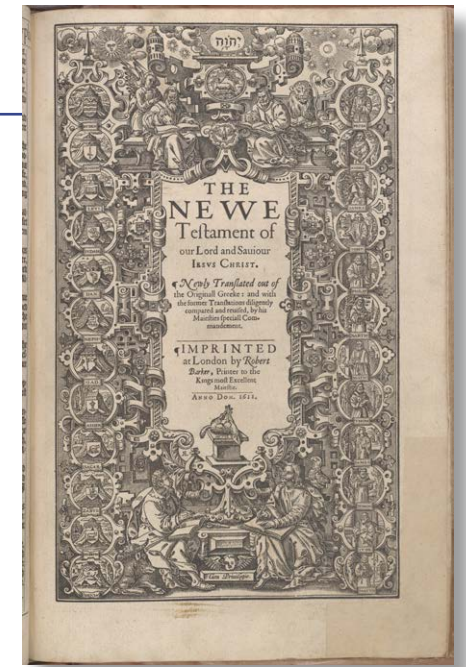
The Reformation, which began with the dissolution of the monasteries under King Henry VIII in 1536, saw England cut ties with the Roman Catholic Church, and created the Protestant Church of England. This change brought communities to consider different ideas about how they should worship.

However, the Reformation also brought greater state control over religion. Individuals could be imprisoned and executed for heresy. Both Catholics and 'radical' Protestants were subject to persecution. One local example was John Lassells from Gateford in Nottinghamshire, who was burnt at the stake in London in July 1546 as he sought further changes to the Church of England.

Under the reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558) the Catholic church was briefly restored. Her sister Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) brought back the Church of England. However, the Protestant religious settlement during her reign brought only temporary stability. Indeed, in this turbulent era, distinct Protestant groups emerged that challenged the authority of the state and the Church of England.

Dissenters, Separatists, Baptists and Puritans all sought to establish a different type of religious practice. Some even demanded separation from the Church of England to form communities of worship based on individual congregations. This practice, sometimes recognised as 'presbyterianism', was vigorously denied by Queen Elizabeth and King James I (1603-1625).

Religious conformity was used to ensure the stability of the realm. In 1611, the King James Bible was published and became the definitive version for all churches in England. The Book of Common Prayer also reinforced the importance of the Church of England. Attendance at the local parish church and adherence to church rules was demanded by law. Nonconformity was viewed with suspicion and fear.



▲ Title page from *The Holy Bible* [The King James Bible] (London, 1611). Special Collection Over.X, BS185.C11



▲ Illustration of the burning of John Lassells and others, from John Foxe, *The first volume of the ecclesiasticall history* ['Foxe's Book of Martyrs'], London, 1576. Special Collection Oversize, BR1600.F6



▲ Anglican bishops Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley and Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury, were burned at the stake for heresy in 1555. Illustration from Joseph Cundall, *Little Mary's Picture Book of English History* (London, 1849) Briggs Collection Pamphlet, LT210.DA/C8