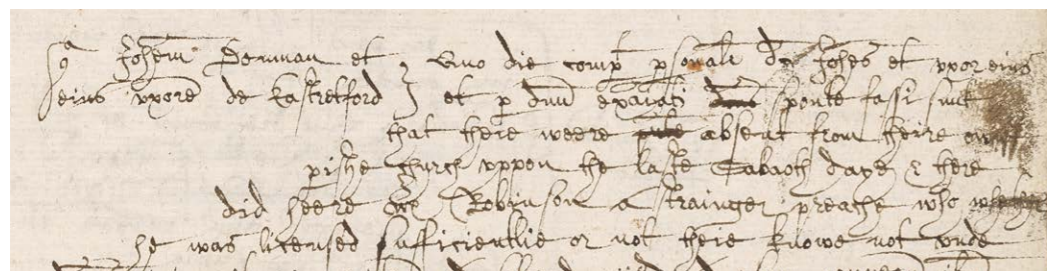


Nottinghamshire was home to a range of religious groups that were regarded as 'dangerous' by the Church of England.



Entry from Act Book recording proceedings at a court held at St Peter's Church, Nottingham, on 1 June 1605. John Denman and his wife were the first of seventeen people prosecuted for 'being absent from their own parish church upon the late Sabbath day' and hearing 'Mr Robinson, a stranger, preach, who whether he was licensed sufficiently or not they know not'. Archive of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham, AN/A 14/1.



Friends Meeting. From an Engraving of the 17th Century.

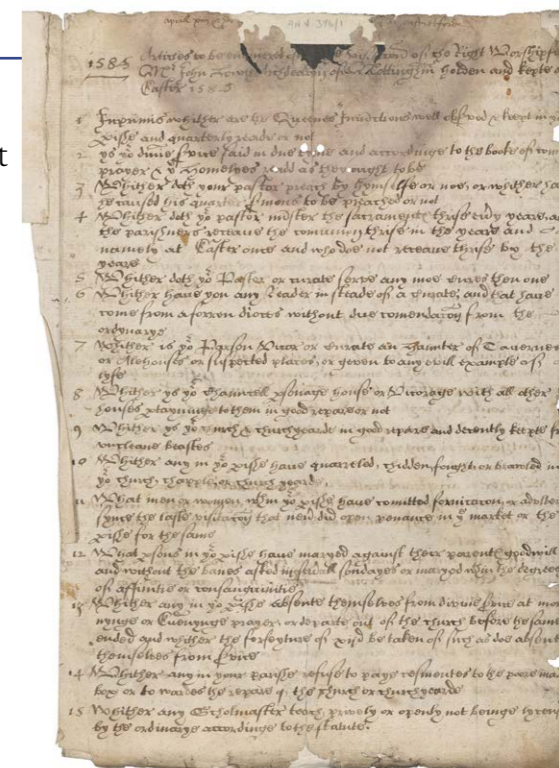
Illustration of a Friends meeting [Quakers], from Cassell's illustrated history of England Vol III. (18-)-1864), p.54. East Midlands Special Collection, Not 1.W8 HOW/W

The county's importance to trade, industry and its situation at the heart of the realm brought scrutiny to any community seeking to depart from established religious practices.

To police faith within the county, local parish churches used church courts where individuals could be accused of departing from the laws on morality and worship set out by the Church of England. In the seventeenth century, these targeted Roman Catholics and dissenting Protestant groups who would not attend services because of their beliefs. The churchwardens in each parish would regularly prepare what was known as a Presentment Bill, which outlined the offences that had been committed in their area.

In Nottinghamshire, groups known as the Dissenters, Puritans and Separatists were regularly denounced for their failure to comply with the established Church. On Whitsunday 1605, the preacher John Robinson spoke at Sturton-le-Steeple in the north of the county. Seventeen people from East Retford, Clarbrough, Ordsall and Babworth parishes later admitted to the Archdeaconry court that they had been there instead of attending their own churches, and were fined sums of money for the benefit of the poor.

Private meetings outside the law were known as 'conventicles'. In places around Nottinghamshire, individuals were practising their religious beliefs beyond the control of the established Church.



Visitation articles: questions asked in each parish, 1585. Article 13 asks whether any in the parish absent themselves from divine service, or depart before service is ended, and whether such people are fined 12 pence. Archive of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham, AN/V 376/1