

Bishop William Knight and Prebendary Sir John FitzJames

At the start of the Reformation, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer helped build the case to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon.

However, it was William Knight (1476-1547), later our Bishop, who Henry sent to Rome in 1527 to promote his divorce. Henry chose Knight despite Cardinal Wolsey's doubts and Knight's own complaints of old age and failing sight.

Wolsey briefed Knight. He was to travel to Venice and look for a chance to see Pope Clement VII. The Pope, however, was a captive of Catherine's nephew, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. By December, the secret of Knight's mission had leaked and the Emperor had instructed Clement VII accordingly. Knight returned in February 1528 empty handed. It had been a lost cause.

Despite this, he still played a role in state affairs until 1541 when he was consecrated our Bishop. He built the market cross. Most notably, though, beside Hugh Sugar's chapel in the Cathedral, he erected a stone pulpit. Some say, "hee caused it to be built for his tombe." Inscribed on it: "Preach thou the worde. Be reverent in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort in all longe suffering & doctrine."

Nearer here, and in December 1536, Knight's predecessor, Bishop John Clerk, granted the Prebend of Whitchurch to Sir John FitzJames. He was no ordinary man. From 1526-39, he was Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. Prior to that, he had been Recorder of Bristol, Attorney General and Chief Baron of the Exchequer.

When, in July 1535, Chief Minister Thomas Cromwell wanted to halt the export of coin, he consulted FitzJames. He asked whether he could use a Royal Proclamation if "there wer no law nor statute made alreadye for any suche purpose". FitzJames said that a proclamation was "of as good effecte as any law made by parlyament or otherwyse". Cromwell was "veray gladde to here" FitzJames' answer

In 1536, at the end of the *Reformation Parliament* – the one that passed major laws breaking with Rome and setting up the Church of England – the King rewarded FitzJames with £40 (= over £20,000).

Reformation was now to get bloody and violent, as we shall see.