

The Reformation starts

We tend to think the Reformation took place all at once. Henry VIII, denied consent to a divorce, splits from Rome and, in 1534, signs the *Act of Supremacy* making him supreme head of the church in England.

It was not like that. Henry lived 13 more years as, he said, a Catholic.

The first events of the Reformation, though, soon took place. In 1536, there were over 800 monasteries, priories and convents. By 1541, there was not one. Evicted were more than 10,000 monks and nuns. The Crown seized the buildings to sell or lease them to lay occupiers.

On 27 January 1539, Prior Holloway and 18 monks surrendered Bath Priory to the King's officials, signing the Deed of Dissolution. The Crown sold the Abbey and lands. Bath ceased its role in our Diocese.

In September 1539, commissioners arrived unannounced at Glastonbury Abbey. Abbot Richard Whiting – on good legal grounds – would not co-operate. The commissioners interrogated him and searched his study for anything incriminating. They sent him to the Tower of London for Thomas Cromwell himself to question. They stripped the Abbey of its valuables. Cromwell sent Whiting back, accused of treason. On 15 November, the 88-year-old Abbot was brutally hanged, drawn and quartered on Glastonbury Tor.

Thomas Cromwell was lay Dean of Wells Cathedral. 'Dissolution' hardly describes his barbarous pillage and plunder.

Early on, Wells Cathedral fared better though Cromwell moved all of its treasures and the contents of its library to London.

John Fitzjames, Prebendary from 1537-54, was the last one to present a rector to Binegar. On 5 March 1540, he gave the right to his brother Nicholas, who had been "diligent to serve the King" at the dissolution of Glastonbury Abbey.

On 14 April 1545, Nicholas gave the right to Thomas – *Little Jack* – Horner. He had been Abbot Whiting's steward, trusted to take deeds of a dozen manors to the King. Secreted in a pie, it was the Abbot's attempt to prevent the King seizing Glastonbury. Horner put in his thumb and pulled out – the deeds to Mellis Manor! In any event, he presented the next rector, John Gregory, on 15 April 1545.