Edward VI and the Church

Henry VIII, Edward’s father made some important changes to the religious life of England, for example he made himself Head of the Church of England instead of the pope. However, apart from the fact the Bible was now in English (not Latin) few people would have noticed many differences to the way religion was practised. People still thought of themselves as Catholics – a traditional form of Christianity. Edward and his advisers wanted to change all this. They had heard about a modern form of Christianity spreading across Europe led by people like the German monk Martin Luther. They protested against the wealth and power of the traditional Catholic Church and wanted a much simpler religion that ordinary people would feel more in tune with. They called themselves Protestants. Edward became a Protestant. To reflect the change in his religious beliefs, Edward ordered that churches across the country be changed. The old Latin services were changed to new simpler ones in English that everyone could understand. Expensive decorations in churches, like gold ornaments, statues of the virgin and paintings of saints were removed. Beautiful stained glass windows were smashed and replaced with clear glass. Walls were whitewashed so they were plain and simple. There were to be no distractions from the word of God in Edward’s Protestant churches.

The changes pleased the protestant minority but they upset the majority of English people.



People in many areas tried to ignore the changes. They had enjoyed the saints’ days and Church festivals as holidays from their busy working lives. They did not like new beliefs and practices being forced upon them. And, although you can change the inside of a church and the language of a prayer book, you cannot change people quite as easily. Many people genuinely believed that Protestantism was wrong. They worried that if they changed the way that they worshipped they would end up in hell.

Edward died tragically young, a slow a painful death. He died of tuberculosis which caused his hair and nails to drop off and his fingers and toes to drop away at the joints. He was just 15 and had no children, so his sister Mary inherited the throne.