

Moments in Our History

(Excerpts from the Dissenting Church of Christ at St. John's 1775 - 1975)

Persecution and Peace (Part 2)

In the next scene, we cannot improve on John Jones' own words ... "Upon presenting the above address, Jones was ordered into the cabin where he received much abusive language and accused of 'wanting to take peoples bread off their Trenchers' as His Excellency phrased it, and of drawing people from their vocations (Sundays were not holidays in St. John's) both of which he denied, producing proof to the contrary and to the latter he referred to the character offered in his favour by the principal merchants. After a long altercation, he was dismissed with this answer, 'that whatever he had a mind to do in his own House he might without interruption, but should have no leave to act in public'."

Greatheed tells us that Jones "was hereby so much disheartened, that he would have returned to England, but for the entreaties of the little society, which then consisted of fifteen members." After "prayer and fasting" they agreed to continue worship in Jones' house and petition their friends in England for relief.

That summer the congregation received a donation of books, valued at 28 £ from the Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor. The books were sent by the Reverend Christopher Mends of Plymouth (whose congregation gifted the communion cup in 1784). In thanking for the books, they solicited the help of their co-religionists to right "the great injustice whereby we, being subjects of Great Britain, despite repeated solicitations, are forbidden to continue our Religious Exercises as Protestant Dissenters in the public place of worship built by us." Meantime, worship continued in Jones' house that winter, observing a further Day of Humiliation, and "the Lord was pleased to add unto them."

In the spring of 1780, a letter arrived from the Reverend Simon Reader of Wareham reporting that the Reverend Dr. Stafford had waited upon the Governor in London "when His Excellency, after some debate, told the Doctor that it was the fault of the Reverend Edward Langman." One would have liked to be a fly on the wall during the interview for the worthy Dr. Stafford, like the Governor, was a forceful speaker. Some years later when Langman's successor questioned John Jones' right to preach, Stafford was pleased to write ... "let him know by the first opportunity, and I'll strip the Gown over his Ears .. let the Governor know that you have friends in London who know how to get access to Mr. Pitt or even to the Throne, the Coronation Oath is your security; That there shall be no persecution for conscience sake of any Protestants in his Reign ... tell him we are not in the hands of the Stewarts, and that no man shall deprive us and our fellow subjects with impunity ... "