

William, Prince of Orange

In the days of Queen Elizabeth I, Devon was a prosperous, wealthy and mainly Protestant County – home to Elizabethans such as Drake, Gilbert, Grenville and Raleigh.

But times changed, and some 85 years after the death of Elizabeth I, following the reigns of Kings James I and Charles I, an English Civil War, and then the reign of King Charles II, Devon found itself divested of much of its wealth and influence under the rule of the Catholic King, James II.

England was on the verge of a second civil war as Anti-Catholic riots broke out across the country. Until June 1688, the Anglican daughter of James II (Mary) and her Protestant husband (William, Prince of Orange) were first in line to the throne. But then James II had a son, (also called James) and the threat of a Roman Catholic dynasty frightened many in England. And so it was that the 'gentlemen of the West' sought change and invited William of Orange to come to England. William had fought in several European wars against the Catholic King of France, and was seen by many as a champion of the Protestant faith.

The small town of Brixham, under the protection of Berry Head, was deemed a good choice for the Prince and his army to land. William wanted to test out the mood of the people, and gauge their reaction to his presence in England, before he made any move to the seat of power – London.

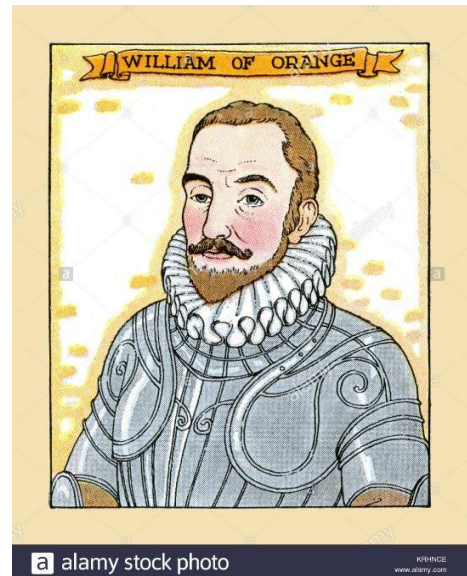
So on 5th November 1688, William of Orange and his force sailed into Brixham Harbour. A Minister in his Fleet pulled out his Bible and spoke *"For the Protestant Religion, and Maintaining of the Gospel in the Truth and Purity thereof, are we all by the Goodness and Providence of God come hither, after so many Storms and Tempests. It is the Prince of Orange that's come, a zealous Defender of that Faith which is truly Ancient, catholic and Apostolical, who is the Supream Governour of this very great and formidable Fleet"*. The Prince then climbed into a little boat, and is reported to have said *"Mine good people, I am come for your goods. I am come for all your goods"*, to which the people of Brixham replied *"You'm welcome!"*.

This welcome followed William across the country as he began his slow journey to London and the Glorious Revolution.

William's first night in England is said to have been spent at Peter Varwell's home, a small house in Middle Street, Brixham, while his army of some 15,400 men and 1,000 officers and 78 field officers spent a cold, frosty night above Brixham on Furzeham Common.

The next day, the order was given to march towards Exeter. The army, in three 'lines', set off through the lanes to Churston and on to the high road, later to become part of the Dartmouth to Shaldon turnpike road. The present main road was not made until the 1840's and William's army travelled along the old Brixham Road and along a ridge that is now the Ring Road.

On leaving Brixham, William headed inland, and along the route people came to see the great army. Despite the cheers, many still remembered the Bloody Assizes of Judge Jefferies that were held following the Monmouth Rebellion three years earlier, so cheers were tinged with fears.



Farmer Webber of Staverton came to give his support to the Prince, and he brought a cart loaded with apples, calling to the soldiers to help themselves as they passed, wishing them “God Speed”.

King William's Cottage

After a march of about six miles, William and his army approached the small village of Yalberton. Here William is said to have taken refreshment in a cottage now known as King William's Cottage. The long and low thatched cottage, with a little cobbled path leading to the front door, probably looks today much the same as it did in 1688.



The owner of the Cottage was so proud of the royal visit that he had ‘an ornamentation’ (a larger plaster memorial) affixed to the ceiling above the place in which the Prince sat – though sadly it is now long gone.

The 16th century cottage is Grade II listed.

Parliament House



Now refreshed, the Prince then marched a further three miles to Longcombe, just outside the hamlet of Aish. Here he met some of the ‘gentlemen of the West’, who had been responsible for inviting the Prince to England. Included in this group was Sir Edward Seymour of Berry Pomeroy – described as ‘foremost among the Tory gentlemen of England’, Sir Edward was also a privy counsellor and opponent of James II. The meeting is known as the future King's first Parliament on English soil. It was agreed that the gentlemen would ‘come out for the Prince’ at Exeter and, at the suggestion of Edward Seymour, would there form an ‘association’ binding them to the service of the Prince.

It is believed that William spent his second night in England at the cottage which, from then onwards, was referred to as

‘Parliament House’.

At the front of the House is the Parliament Stone bearing the inscription “William, Prince of Orange, is said to have held his first Parliament here 6th November 1688”.

The House is now a Grade II listed building, but originally it is thought to have been four cottages. Inside it has retained many of its original features, including a circular staircase made of stone.

Accounts of the route the Prince took vary – some say that the Prince then marched to Paignton, where he was ‘proclaimed to the people of Paignton’ from a stone in front of the West Door of the parish church. In honour of this, it is said that the old Posting House on Fore Street (now Church Street) was renamed the ‘Crown & Sceptre’ (later changed to ‘Crown & Anchor’). He then marched to Newton Abbot where the proclamation was again read. Then, as they say, the rest is history. William III and Mary were crowned as joint monarchs in Westminster Abbey on 11th April 1689.

References:

‘The Prince it is that’s come’ by Joyce Packe

‘A Paignton Scrapbook’ by Peggy Parnell