

BLUE PLAQUES WILL HONOUR NAVAL**REBUILT CHURCH:** The Unitarian Church in Great Yarmouth

Picture: PHIL MORLEY

Defying the King led to a new church

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A story full of danger and excitement, of an execution and persecution, will unfold when a blue plaque is unveiled in Great Yarmouth.

The unveiling of the plaque taking place tomorrow, is twofold - marking the 60th anniversary of the rebuilding of the Unitarian Church after it was bombed during the second world war; but perhaps more importantly celebrating a key player in the Dissenters' Movement.

The Reverend William Bridge, a key player in the movement, chose Yarmouth in preference to Norwich to set up the Dissenters' Church in Norfolk; it was safer for him to operate on the coast because he was further away from the Cathedral and the influential Bishop.

Bridge was in fear of arrest and possible judicial death because of his beliefs and fled to Holland in 1636 to escape capture. King Charles I said: "We are well rid of him", when he heard of Bridge's departure.

However, the King was executed, and the persecution of the Dissenters diminished. Bridge returned with a colleague named Oxenbridge and they founded independent congregations in both Yarmouth and Norwich. Bridge later set up the Nonconformist Church in Yarmouth.

The Dissenters adopted the name of Unitarian in the 19th century because they did not believe in the Trinity.

Great Yarmouth Local History and Archaeological Society will unveil the blue

plaque on the church's Yarmouth Way building at noon tomorrow, Saturday.

The refusal of some people to adhere to the tenets of Henry VIII's Church of England has always been strong in Yarmouth in particular. These people were not Roman Catholics who wanted to return to the old religion, but Dissenters, who

thought church reforms had not gone far enough.

In Yarmouth, two independent congregations developed outside the Church of England, the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians and for a time they shared St Nicholas' Parish Church, which was physically divided into three sections.

When the Stuarts came to the throne, the Dissidents came under heavy persecution and could be put to death for their beliefs if tried and convicted.

William Bridge died in 1670, aged 70, well respected for his learning and integrity. His successors finally built their own Meeting House in 1673, on or near the present site of the Unitarian Church.

It has been rebuilt several times, but has remained, on what is now Yarmouth Way, ever since.

The premises are available to hire with the longest local user the Phyllis Adams School of Dance.

Funds from many sources, both local and national, are contributing towards an ongoing programme of refurbishment of the Yarmouth building, including the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Norfolk Community Foundation (Love Norfolk) and the John Gregson Unitarian Trust.

