

Henry Sacheverell

1674 – 5 June 1724



Henry Sacheverell by Thomas Gibson 1710

The son of Joshua Sacheverell, rector of St. Peter's, Marlborough, Henry was adopted by his godfather, Edward Hearst an apothecary due to poor circumstances of his father. He was educated at Marlborough grammar school before his godfather's widow Katharine sent him to Magdalen College Oxford. He matriculated on 28 August 1689 aged 15. He was a student at Magdalen College until 1701, obtaining his BA in 1693, his MA in 1695 and a fellow from 1701 to 1713. He gained his Bachelor of Divinity on 27 January 1707 and created Doctor of Divinity 1 July 1708.

He was a preacher at St Saviour's, Southwark in 1705 and preached his famous sermons at St Paul's and Derby in 1709 for which he was impeached by the House of Commons. Sacheverell's sermons entitled *The Perils of False Brethren, in Church, and State* compared the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot to the date of the execution of Charles I on 30 January 1649, as two days of the "rage and bloodthirstiness of both the popish and fanatick enemies of our Church and Government...These TWO DAYS indeed are but one united proof and visible testimonial of the same dangerous and rebellious principles these confederates in iniquity maintain".

Sacheverell's trial lasted from 27 February to 21 March 1710 and the verdict was that he should be suspended for three years and that the two sermons should be burnt. This was the decree of the state, and it had the effect of making him a martyr in the eyes of the populace and (along with heavy taxes on Londoners) bringing about the first riots that year in London and the rest of the country. The rioting in turn led to the downfall of the government ministry later that year and the passing of the Riot Act in 1714.

He was rector of Selattyn, Shropshire from 1710 to 1713 during his suspension and treated as a public hero. He was latterly rector at St Andrew's, Holborn from 1713 and in June 1716 married the widow of his benefactor and cousin George Sacheverell. Mary was fourteen years his senior and brought him considerable wealth.

On 7 January 1723 during a sharp frost, he fell on the stone steps in the front of his house, hurting himself badly and breaking two ribs. He died of a complication of this and other disorders at his home The Grove, Highgate on 5th June 1724. He was buried at St Andrew's Holborn on 12 June 1724.

There is considerably more detail of his life, sermons and political actions in the Dictionary of National Biography.