

Hugh LATIMER

Bishop
and
Martyr

16 Oct 1555



Nicholas RIDLEY

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Thomas CRANMER

Bishop
and Martyr

21 Mar 1556

When [Henry VIII of England](#) died, he left three heirs: his son [Edward](#) and his two daughters, [Mary](#) and [Elizabeth](#). [Edward](#) succeeded to the throne and was a staunch Protestant (or at least his advisors were). Under his rule, the church services, previously in Latin, were translated into English, and other changes were made. When [Edward](#) died, the throne passed to his sister [Mary](#), who was firmly Roman Catholic in her beliefs. She determined to return England to union with the Pope. With more diplomacy, she might have succeeded. But she was headstrong and would take no advice. Her mother had been Spanish, and she determined to marry [Felipe](#), the heir to the throne of Spain, not realizing how much her people (of all religious persuasions) feared that this would make England a province of the Spanish Empire. She insisted that the best way to deal with heresy was to burn as many heretics as possible. (It is worth noting that her husband was opposed to this). In the course of a five-year reign, she lost all the English holdings on the continent of Europe, she lost the affection of her people, and she lost any chance of a peaceful religious settlement in England. Of the nearly three hundred persons burned by her orders, the most famous are the Oxford Martyrs, commemorated today.

Hugh Latimer, Bishop of Worcester

Details of **Hugh Latimer's** early life are sketchy, at best. Sources date his birth somewhere between 1475 and 1495, usually setting on 1485. He was born to a prosperous and generous farmer in Thurcaston, Leicester, England. Recognizing his gifts, his hard-working father sent him to Cambridge around 1506. He received his bachelor's degree around 1510 and his master's degree in 1514 before beginning to study divinity. While at Cambridge, **Latimer** was an ardent defender of the Roman church and thought so ill of the reformers as to say, *"Impiety was gaining ground apace, and what lengths might not men be expected to run, when they began to question even the infallibility of the Pope?"* In his free time, he followed the defenders of the reformation into their meetinghouses, disputed with them, and implored them to abandon their convictions. Moreover, he orally defended his divinity degree in 1524 by attacking the theology of the reformer **Philip Melancthon**. *"At last,"* said his hearers, *"England, nay Cambridge, will furnish a champion for the church that will confront the Wittenberg doctors, and save the vassal of our Lord"*.



Merle D'Aubigne puts it this way, *"He was a second Saul, and was soon to resemble the apostle of the Gentiles in another respect"*. Through the workings of **Thomas Bilney**, one of those whom **Latimer** had persecuted in the meetinghouses, **Latimer** would undergo an immense paradigm shift. **Bilney** went to the college where Latimer

resided, begging to make confession. **Latimer** thought, "*My discourse against Melanchthon has no doubt converted him*". There, kneeling before **Latimer**, **Bilney** shared with Latimer "*the anguish he had once felt in his soul*", "*the efforts he had made to remove it*", and "*lastly, the peace he had felt when he believed that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world*". **Latimer** no doubt knew this anguish, for each time Latimer mixed water with wine, as the missal directed, his conscience was troubled that he did not mix adequate water. Trying to live by vain superstitions had left **Latimer** feeling insufficient. And so, **Latimer** listened, trying to chase away his thoughts. But **Bilney** continued. When **Bilney** finally arose from his knees, **Latimer** remained seated, weeping. The gracious **Bilney** consoled him, "*Brother, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow*".

And **Latimer** arose a new man. His zeal did not leave him; it simply switched its allegiance. **Latimer** became the most popular preacher of his day. His sermons spoke little of doctrine, but rather, his practical sermons spurred his hearers on to godliness through upright living and devout prayer. Furthermore, **Latimer** maintained that the Bible should be read in every household. The priests of the Roman church gathered their forces. If **Latimer** was to express the blessing of the Scripture, they would show its dangers. The **prior of Buckingham** picked a few passages out of Scripture and preached:

The ploughman, reading in the gospel that no man having put his plough should look back, would soon lay aside his labour..The baker, reading that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, will in future make us nothing but very insipid bread; and the simple man commanded to pluck out the right eye and cast it from thee, England, after a few years, will be a frightful spectacle; it will be little better than a nation of blind and one-eyed men, sadly begging their bread from door to door.

The next Sunday, with **Buckingham** sitting right in front of him, **Latimer** summarized the **prior's** sermon, showing the absurdity of each point. Looking at the **prior**, he then added,

Do not we know that in all languages and in all speeches, it is not on the image that we must fix our eyes, but on the thing which the image represents? For instance, if we see a fox painted preaching in a friar's hood, nobody imagines that a fox is meant, but that craft and hypocrisy are described, which are so often found disguised in that garb.

At these words, all eyes of the congregation turned to the prior, who quickly ran away like Brave Sir Robin.

The priests gathered to petition **Dr. West, Bishop of Ely**, at Cambridge to forbid **Latimer** to speak. West attended Latimer's next sermon. Upon the entrance of West, **Latimer** calmly waited until he was seated. He then decided to change his sermon topic in honor of his new guest. Latimer began preaching of Christ, the model for all bishops. Although **Latimer** did not directly attack **West**, the people exclaimed that the Bishop that **Latimer** described was unlike any of their bishops. **West** forbade **Latimer** to preach in the university and the diocese. Thus **Latimer** took up preaching at the Augustinian monastery of **Robert Barnes**, which was not under episcopal jurisdiction.

On Christmas Eve, 1525, **Barnes** exchanged pulpits with **Latimer**. There **Barnes** preached with hostility against **Cardinal Wolsey**, who was present for **Barnes'** sermon. **Barnes** was brought before **Wolsey**, recanted, served three years in prison, and finally escaped to Germany. **Latimer**, also brought before **Wolsey**, was able to return to his Cambridge pulpit. In 1531, he came under the favor of **Henry VIII** for supporting him in his quest to annul his marriage to **Catalina de Aragon**. In that year, he received the benefice of West Kingston, Wiltshire, where he was able to teach Reformed doctrine. He also befriended **Thomas Cromwell** and **Thomas Cranmer**

here. However, the next year he was excommunicated from the church for refusing to subscribe to certain beliefs such as purgatory and the importance of venerating saints. In a sermon before [Henry VIII](#), he began exclaiming, "*Latimer, Latimer, thou art going to speak before the high and mighty King, Henry VIII, who is able, if he think fit, to take thy life away. Be careful what thou sayest. But Latimer, Latimer, remember thou art also about to speak before the King of kings and Lord of lords. Take heed thou dost not displease Him*".

Thanks to the influence of [Cromwell](#) and [Anne Boleyn](#), **Latimer** would later become Bishop of Worcester in 1535. But he was left with no choice but to resign in 1539 when he was forced to comply with the Six Articles, a return to Romish doctrines he opposed. As he threw off the robes of his bishopric, he leaped into the air, and declared that he found himself lighter than he had ever felt before. He was later put into prison for a short period of time but released in 1547, with the accession of [Edward VI](#). He spent the next six years of his life as a humble preacher, residing with his dear friend, **Thomas Cranmer**.

However, when [Mary](#) took the throne in 1553, she put an end to his preaching the gospel. One of her first acts was the imprisonment of the leading Reformers, among whom was **Latimer**. He was thrown in the Tower of London with **Cranmer**, **Nicholas Ridley**, and **John Bradford**. There he spent most of his time praying so long that he could not get up without help.

Nicholas Ridley, Bishop of Rochester

English prelate, reformer, and Protestant martyr, **Nicholas Ridley** was the son of **Christopher Ridley**, the Lord of Ridley, in the county of Northumberland, from 1519. **Christopher** was a confidante of [Henry VIII](#) and, it is reported, one of the few men whom [Henry](#) really regarded as a friend. The Lordship dates from 1230 when it was created and first bestowed on **John Ridley** by **King Henry III**. The domain of Ridley lies in the Northumbrian area of England, on the river Tyne, a few miles east of Haltwhistle and twelve miles west of Hexham. Haydon Bridge is three miles to the east and Hadrian's Wall just four miles north. On **John's** death in 1258 his son, **Richard**, succeeded to the Title. **Richard** played a crucial role in the development of science of that era by being the patron of **Roger Bacon** who is credited with the invention of the optical lens and gunpowder (though the Arabs may have known it earlier). **Richard Ridley**, Lord from 1330 until 1368, entertained **Edward III** as the English marched through Ridley in 1332 on their way to invade Scotland. The following year **Richard** was invited to be present at the Royal coronation in Scotland. Among the many notable Lords of Ridley was **Joseph**, who, in 1485, joined [Henry Tudor](#) and his army and, at the head of a band of men from Ridley, fought in the decisive battle of [Bosworth](#). **Joseph's** son Nicholas, succeeded to the Lordship in 1490 and was appointed to a leading position in the Royal mint. He was instrumental in reforming the coinage, and was responsible for the minting of the first pound coin, the sovereign.



In 1534, **Nicholas Ridley**, while a proctor of Cambridge, signed the decree against the pope's supremacy in England. In 1537 he became chaplain to **Thomas Cranmer**, in 1540 master of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and in 1541 chaplain to [Henry VIII](#) and canon of Canterbury. Under the reign of [Edward](#), he became Bishop of Rochester (1547), and was part of the committee that drew up the first English Book of Common Prayer. As Bishop of Rochester, **Ridley** was chosen to strengthen and establish the Reformed teachings at Cambridge, and he was a commissioner in the examination that resulted in the deposition of bishops [Stephen Gardiner](#) and [Edmund Bonner](#). In 1550 he succeeded [Bonner](#) as [Bishop of London](#), where he did much to improve the condition of the poor by preaching on social injustices before the King. **Ridley** supported [Lady Jane Grey's](#) claims to the crown, and in 1553, shortly after the accession of the Catholic [Mary I](#), he was imprisoned. With **Cranmer** and **Hugh Latimer** he took part (1554) in the Oxford disputations against a group of Catholic theologians and would not recant his Protestant faith.





On Oct 16, 1555, **Ridley** and **Latimer** were lead to their martyrdom. **Ridley** came fully robed, as he would be dressed as a Bishop. **Latimer**, wore a simple frieze frock. The seventy-year-old **Latimer** followed feebly behind **Ridley**. **Ridley** gave his clothes away to those standing by. **Latimer** quietly stripped to his shroud. "And though in his clothes he appeared a withered, crooked old man, he now stood bolt upright". As they were fastened to their stakes, **Ridley's** brother tied a bag of gunpowder to both of their necks. And then, as a burning faggot was laid at the feet of **Ridley**, **Latimer** spoke his famous words:

"Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle. By God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out."

John Foxe relates the rest,

And so the fire being kindled, when Ridley saw the fire flaming up towards him, he cried with a loud voice, "Lord into Thy hands I commend my spirit: Lord, receive my spirit!" and repeated the latter part often. Latimer, crying as vehemently on the other side of the stake, "Father of heaven, receive my soul!" received the flame as if embracing it. After he had stroked his face with his hands, and as it were bathed them a little in the fire, he soon died, as it appeared, with very little pain.

Latimer, who lived and died unmarried, eased out of this world. But it was not so with his friend **Nicholas Ridley**. The faggots being piled too high, he screamed for his bystanders to pull off some of the wood. Misunderstanding him, his brother-in-law, added more sticks to the fire. The fire "burned clean all his nether parts, before it once touched the upper; and that made him often desire them to let the fire come unto him". He exclaimed, 'I cannot burn!'. When he turned to his watchers, they saw a ghastly sight. "After his legs were consumed he showed that side towards us clean, shirt and all untouched with flame". Finally, a bystander pulled the faggots from the fire, and the fire flamed to his face, igniting the gunpowder. And he stirred no more. And as hundreds of bystanders looked on at these two motionless bodies, all that could be heard was weeping.

Nicholas' heir was **Thomas Ridley**, a cousin. **Thomas** became the headmaster of Eton and later the Vicar-General to the Archbishop of Canterbury. He married **Margaret Boleyn**, a relative of [Queen Anne Boleyn](#), and became an advisor to **King James I**.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury



Archbishop Cranmer, the great church reformer and martyr, was born in Aslacton, in the parish of Whatton, in 1489 and became, in 1532, the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury.

The site of Aslacton manor house was the seat of **Archbishop Cranmer**, and many of his ancestors. Near it may still distinctly be traced several moats, islands and other remains of the pleasure grounds, and at a short distance is a raised walk which leads to Orston, and is yet called Cranmer's Walk. At the west end, on crossing a moat, the visitor may ascend a square mount of considerable elevation, and from thence have an extensive prospect. Here are also two other mounts, said to have been raised by the **Archbishop**, but they have been greatly reduced by some of the former owners of the estate. On one of them, tradition says, the **Archbishop** "was wont to sit and survey the surrounding country, and listen to the tuneable bells of Whatton".

The church, which **Adelina de Whatton** gave to Welbeck Abbey, is dedicated to **St John of Beverley**. It has a handsome tower and spire with five bells, and contains many ancient monuments of the Whatton, Newmarch, Cranmer and other families.

Leland speaks of Aslacton and the 'heire of the Cranmers', the **Archbishop's** elder brother, and it would be to his house that the martyr resorted when visiting the neighbourhood. He had, however, some property here, as appears by an entry in the State Papers, dated 1528, five years prior to his elevation to the episcopal bench.

In the parish registers are various entries of the baptisms and deaths of members of the family. **Ralph Morice**, the private secretary of the **Archbishop**, has left behind him some interesting notes of his eminent master, in which he gives colour to the belief that the first of the family to settle in this country came into the realm with **William the Conqueror**. Prior to their appearance in Nottinghamshire they lived at Lutterton, and occupied a good position there. By the marriage of **Edward Cranmer** with the heiress of the **Aslocktons** they assumed the arms of the latter. **Thomas Cranmer** married **Agnes**, daughter of **Laurence Hatfield**, of Willoughby, Notts, and resided at the old manor-house at Aslockton. Their second son became **Archbishop**, and though we do not know much of his youthful days a few details have been collected in Strype's 'Memorials.'

Whether the future **Archbishop** was educated by the parish priest, or whether he went to a grammar school in any of the towns of the neighbourhood, is a matter of speculation. **Morice** says that when he went to Cambridge he left 'a grammar school' to go there. But if not trained at home in literature and the arts, he received in the open fields of this broad stretch of country what was of great importance to him in after-life, an efficient knowledge of outdoor exercises and pastimes, and the foundations of a strong constitution. 'His father used him to shoot with the long-bow, and let him hunt and hawk and ride rough horses'. Shortly after the funeral of his father at Whatton, in 1501, his mother sent him at fourteen years of age to Jesus College, Cambridge. His subsequent career is a matter of general history, and need not be dwelt upon here.

Thomas Cranmer defended the position that **Henry's** marriage to **Catalina De Aragon** was null and void, collecting opinions in his favor from the universities. **Cranmer** went (1530) to Rome to argue the **King's** case and was (1532) an Ambassador to Holy Roman Emperor **Carlos V**. In 1533, **Henry** named him Archbishop of Canterbury, and as soon as the appointment was confirmed by the **Pope**, **Cranmer** proclaimed that **Henry's** marriage to **Catalina** was invalid. A few days later he crowned **Anne Boleyn** as **Henry's** Queen. Completely subservient to the **King's** will, **Cranmer** declared **Anne's** marriage invalid in 1536. In 1537, he was the godfather of **Prince Edward**, the first legitimate son of **King**



[Henry](#). He promoted [Henry](#)'s marriage (1540) to [Anne of Cleves](#) and the divorce from her, and was later (1542) one of the accusers of [Catherine Howard](#). **Cranmer** was strongly influenced by the German Reformation. With his friend [Thomas Cromwell](#), he endorsed the translation of the Bible into English and was influential in procuring a royal proclamation (1538) providing for a copy in every parish church. However, as long as [Henry VIII](#) lived, the Archbishop could promote no significant doctrinal changes. The situation changed with the accession (1547) of the young [Edward VI](#), during whose reign **Cranmer** shaped the doctrinal and liturgical transformation of the Church of England. He was responsible for much of the first [Book of Common Prayer](#) (1549) and compiled the revision of 1552, which contains the most famous examples of his sonorous prose, with the aid of prominent Continental reformers. His Forty-two Articles (1553), though never formally adopted, formed the basis of the Thirty-nine Articles. In 1547 [Edward VI](#). granted to the **Archbishop** for the sum of £429 13s. the rectories of Whatton and Aslacton, with the advowson of the churches, both belonging to Welbeck Abbey. **Cranmer** supported the claims of [Lady Jane Grey](#) after [Edward](#)'s death. When [Mary](#) came to the throne, **Cranmer** was in a quandary. He had believed, with a fervor that many people today will find hard to understand, that it is the duty of every Christian to obey the monarch, and that "*the powers that be are ordained of God*" (Romans 13). As long as the monarch was ordering things that **Cranmer** thought good, it was easy for **Cranmer** to believe that the King was sent by God's providence to guide the people in the path of true religion, and that disobedience to the King was disobedience to God. Now [Mary](#) was Queen, and commanding him to return to the Roman obedience. **Cranmer** five times wrote a letter of submission to the Pope and to Roman Catholic doctrines, and four times he tore it up. In the end, he submitted. However, [Mary](#) was unwilling to believe that the submission was sincere, and he was ordered to be burned at Oxford on 21 Mar 1556. At the very end, he repudiated his final letter of submission, and announced that he died a Protestant. He said, "*I have sinned, in that I signed with my hand what I did not believe with my heart. When the flames are lit, this hand shall be the first to burn*". And when the fire was lit around his feet, he leaned forward and held his right hand in the fire until it was charred to a stump. Aside from this, he did not speak or move, except that once he raised his left hand to wipe the sweat from his forehead. See a tetimony of [the execution of Archbishop Cranmer](#) by an anonymous bystander.

After his death his property passed to his nephew **Thomas**, and subsequently to **Thomas Molyneux**, who married **Alice Cranmer**, daughter and heiress. The son of **Thomas Molyneux**, a **Sir John Molyneux, Bart.**, sold the estate, and Aslockton and the Cranmer family thus became finally severed.

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