

John Foxe (1517 - 1587)

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Historical Background

THE name of John Foxe is inextricably linked with the time of Queen Mary Tudor, who during her brief reign of forty-five months had 283 Protestant martyrs burned alive. As Foxe heard the account of the sufferings of these men and women during their trials and executions he felt that the people of England should not forget these courageous saints. His Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church (commonly known as the Book of Martyrs), gives a faithful testimony of a persecuted Church prepared to suffer affliction rather than to yield to the heresies of Rome.

What is not generally known, however, is that Foxe became a prebendary or honorary canon, of Salisbury Cathedral in 1563, and that he wrote detailed accounts of the trials and deaths of the three Salisbury Martyrs, John Maundrel, William Coberley and John Spicer, and also accounts of the examination and condemnation in Salisbury of two other men - John Hunt and Richard White - who only escaped burning at the stake by the death of Queen Mary (1558), a woman whose ruthlessness and cruelty earned her the name of 'Bloody Mary'.

John Foxe was born in Boston, Lincolnshire in 1517. This was no insignificant year in the history of God's Church. In Germany, Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, began to oppose the errors of Rome. He especially sought to denounce the system of 'indulgences'. This was a system which appealed to both Pope and peasant: to the former because it brought in large sums of money to further his self-glorifying cause, and to the latter because it granted an absolution from sins past, present, and future with very little inconvenience to the sinner. During

Foxe's earliest years English support for Luther gained momentum.

In 1517, Henry VIII was on the throne of England. He was given the title 'Defender of the Faith' in 1521, by Leo X for opposing Luther on the subject of the sacraments. Later, Henry vacillated between support for Romanism and Protestantism and expected all his subjects to do likewise. He repudiated Papal Supremacy over the Church when approval for his divorce from Catherine of Aragon was denied. He then surrounded himself in court with men like Cranmer, who would argue favourably for his case. And yet, when his enemies on the Continent were proving too great a threat to the stability of his throne, he imposed the Six Articles (which promoted Romanist doctrine) upon the nation, making denying them punishable by death. In reality Henry was a pragmatist and the party which promoted his own position at any given point gained the greater influence.

The church in Salisbury was still under the influence of Papal Power in 1517. But the Church of England generally was slowly assuming a degree of independence from Roman doctrine as teaching in the English language became more widespread and Bibles were occasionally in the hands of the people. Prior to Henry's break with Rome, the bishop of Salisbury had often been an Italian Cardinal who lived in Rome and represented the King's interests at the Papal Court. His duties were usually carried out by a deputy. Edmund Touchet was the bishop of Salisbury in 1517.

Gospel Influences

To return to Foxe, little is known of his earlier years and upbringing. His father died when he was very young and his mother remarried. This

second marriage was to Richard Melton, a yeoman of Coningsby. His step-father tutored him until the age of sixteen. Following this he entered Brazenose College, Oxford. Here he graduated B.A. 1537 and M.A. 1543. In the same year (1543) he was elected fellow of Magdalen College.

When Foxe first entered Brazenose College he showed all the signs of a strong attachment to Popery and its superstitions. He laughed 'at the idea of justification by faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, [and] thought himself sufficiently safe in the imaginary merit of his own self-denial, penances, alms-deeds, and compliances with the rites of the church.' He was, however, a keen student and excelled in his studies, especially ecclesiastical history, the writings of the Church fathers, and the Scriptures in the original tongue. In due time the Lord was pleased to use these studies to the good of his own soul. He saw how far Popery had departed from Biblical Christianity and this led him to question his own salvation. Seeking to be thoroughly acquainted with both Protestant and Popish arguments, he looked at how the Church of Christ flourished when founded on sound doctrine and how it declined when it embraced error. It was not long before he openly professed the Gospel and separated himself from the heresies of Rome. Although it is believed by many that Foxe was expelled from his college having been convicted as a heretic, college records state that he resigned of his own accord.

Foxe was reduced to great straits and received little support from family or friends at this time. He eventually found refuge in the home of Sir Thomas Lucy of Warwickshire, who employed him as tutor to his children. During this time (Feb. 3rd 1547), he married Agnes Randall of Coventry. The same year Henry VIII died and was succeeded on the throne by his son Edward VI. This prompted Foxe to consider a move to London where he hoped his prospects

for advancing the Protestant cause would be well received.

Developments in Salisbury

Returning to the history of Salisbury, by 1547 the effects of the Reformation were becoming evident. Bishop Campeggio (the Pope's nominee), lost his bishopric in 1535 for not approving of Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. He was succeeded by Nicholas Shaxton. Bishop Shaxton had an earnest desire to remedy the prevailing evils of the church, and sought to improve the moral and spiritual tenor of the clergy and laity. He placed particular emphasis upon the preached Word: 'As regards sermons, he charges that they be preached purely, sincerely, and according to the true Scriptures of God.' He especially directed the clergy to the memorization of Scripture, including the Gospels of Matthew and John and other New Testament portions, and all this in English.

At the time of Henry VIII issuing the Six Articles, Bishops Shaxton and Latimer declined support for the King. However, they were later forced to both submit to the Articles and to resign their bishoprics. Shaxton was replaced in 1539 by John Capon. It was during his period as bishop that Salisbury witnessed some of its bloodiest years in its persecution of Protestants. His episcopate at Salisbury is best described in the words of William Henry Jones:

[Shaxton's] successor at Sarum was the versatile, and it is to be feared, unscrupulous Capon (or Salcot). None but such as he could have held the see through so many phases of opinion. Succeeding to it at the time of the reign of Henry VIII, he held it alike during the iconoclastic period of the protectorate, the reign of Edward VI, the terrible days of Mary, even till the reorganization and final establishment of the Anglican doctrine under Elizabeth. As the king's commissioner he sent several to the stake in the days of Henry VIII. Under Edward VI he became a Protestant; and, changing once more under Mary, sat as a judge at the trial of Bishop Hooper and John

Rogers. He saw the fall of Thomas Cromwell, the final suppression of the Jesuits, the confiscation of chantries and colleges. During his episcopate of hardly more than twenty years he saw many a one put to death for heresy, or denying the king's supremacy, or on other pretences; among the more notable sufferers were Archbishop Cranmer, and Bishops Ridley and Latimer.

Life in London

As we return to London in 1547, we see Providence directing the ways of Foxe. Initially, Foxe was busy in the work of translation, and completed three Protestant sermons, which were subsequently published. One of these sermons was by Luther and another by Urbannus Regius.

The greater part of Foxe's time in London was taken up with his tutoring the Earl of Surrey's children. The Earl of Surrey (Henry Howard), and his father the Duke of Norfolk, had been imprisoned in the Tower of London. The Earl was executed for treason in January 1547. The care of the late Earl's children was left to the Duchess of Richmond who was favourably disposed to the Reformers' cause. It was she who approached Foxe to undertake this charge.

On June 24th, 1550, Foxe was ordained by Nicholas Ridley. Foxe was a faithful preacher of the Word and saw fruit for his Gospel labours in his day. It is said that in the house of Thomas, Duke of Norfolk, Foxe was the first to preach the Gospel. Among his converts was the Lady of Ouldsworth, who had been known for her idolatrous and superstitious worship. But this dear soul was translated from darkness to light, and lost all in this world to the safety of her soul in the heavenly kingdom.

The Privy Council, which was formed on the accession of Edward VI to the throne, was dominated by pro-reform Protestants. The power of this council was somewhat weakened when Edward Seymour assumed the custody of his nephew, King Edward,

and left the Council with little option other than to agree to him becoming Lord Protector. Edward Seymour and Cranmer were now the two leading men in introducing Protestant doctrines into the Church of England. However, both were motivated by opposing principles. The former was driven by a political ambition to gain power, and the latter was motivated by the desire to see a nation living to the glory and honour of God. They both saw the need to move slowly and to have the King's authority undergirding all necessary change. This approach was promoted at the same time by the extensive circulation and approval of Tyndale's work, *Obedience of a Christian Man*. In Parliament the Act of the Six Articles and the Acts for the Burning of Heretics were repealed. Priests were allowed to marry, the Book of Common Prayer was drafted, and when it was introduced the Act of Uniformity was passed. The altars were removed from churches and replaced by tables to serve communion, and the laity were to receive both elements of the Lord's Supper.

Cranmer desired that all the reformed churches in Europe would unite under one confession of faith to stand in opposition to the teachings of Rome. The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England, published in 1553, never achieved this desired end. An ever-increasing split seemed to develop among the Reformers. There were those who held to the thorough-going views of reform of Calvin and Bucer on the Continent, and those, like Ridley and Cranmer, who held to the less radical position.

Foxe was also taken up with the religious issues of the day. He entered into debate with the reformer George Joye on such topics as adultery, excommunication, and canon law.

Time of Instability

Although the Heretics Acts had been repealed early in the reign of Edward VI, two people were put on trial as heretics and subsequently burned. (Lawyers pointed out that prior to the 1401 Act, the King

exercised his power under common law to have heretics condemned by the Church, burned.) This fate befell Joan Bocher (Joan of Kent). She was a friend of Anne Askew and had come to London to promote her (Joan's) Anabaptist doctrines. John Foxe was greatly affected by her trial, and felt so strongly that she should be spared (though he did not agree with her heresy) that he visited John Rogers to plead for her life. (Rogers was a leading Protestant figure in London and took part in the examination of Joan Bocher.) Foxe felt that if she should die, her death should answer '... better to the mildness of the Gospel.' Foxe was unable to prevail with Rogers. She was burnt alive on the 2nd of May, 1550, at Smithfield.

In the case of George van Parris, a Flemish refugee, Foxe did not remain silent either. This refugee was an uneducated, simple, but gentle man who held Arian views. Having been routed from the foreign Protestant church in London, and denounced by Lasco (whose role was the close supervision of this refugee church), there was little hope of van Parris escaping execution. As he refused to recant, he was burnt at Smithfield in April 1551. Foxe was one of the few who opposed his burning.

These two burnings of 'heretics' may well give reasonable ground for discouragement in how 'extreme' Protestants were treated. Remembering the temper of the times, the wonder is not that there were two executions for religious opinion in Edward's reign, but that there were not more. But this should not obscure the excellent work of reform which was carried out during the reign of Edward. The transition from Romanism to Biblical Christianity in England was marked indeed by discouragement and opposition, and at times seemed greatly hindered by the powers of darkness. Nevertheless these were blessed years (although politically and socially unstable), when the Gospel had free course, and real progress in reform was made. These days were brought to an abrupt end

with the early death of the young king and Mary's accession to the throne. It was not long before Foxe felt the effects of a papist monarch. He was deprived of his tutorship by the children's grandfather, the Duke of Norfolk, who on Mary's accession was released from prison.

Among the Exiles

As the political climate worsened Foxe felt personally threatened by Bishop Gardiner, and was eventually compelled to join the Marian exiles. Foxe and his wife (who was then pregnant at the time), left England and eventually joined the English refugees in Basle, Switzerland.

While in Basle, Foxe took advantage of the city's renowned superiority in printing and found employment as a reader for the press. Foxe continued in his studies while there, especially on his great work of ecclesiastical history. Two of his writings at this time demonstrate the compassionate heart, and doctrinal mind which Foxe possessed. The former is seen in his writing to the nobility of England beseeching them to refrain from the persecutions then carried out towards Protestants, and

the latter, in his translating Cranmer's Answer to Gardiner on the Sacrament. However due to the ongoing sacramental controversy in Germany and Switzerland, Cranmer's Answer was not able to go to print. Foxe's greatest work, Acts and Monuments of the Christian Church, was begun in Basle. This work was greatly assisted by two men, Edmund Grindal and John Aylmer.

Grindal's Influence on Foxe

Edmund Grindal was a well-loved servant of the Protestant Reformation. He was born in 1519, in Cumberland. He graduated M.A. in 1541 from Cambridge and in 1544 was ordained by the bishop of Winchester, John Bird. He was actively involved in disputes against Romish heresy and in 1550 was appointed as one of Bishop Ridley's chaplains. Ridley described him as '...a man known to be both of virtue,

honesty, discretion, wisdom, and learning.’ In 1551, Grindal was appointed chaplain to King Edward VI. During his exile one of his chief employments was collecting and communicating to John Foxe ‘the writings and stories of the learned and pious sufferers in England, and to publish them: for which purpose he had a great correspondence here.’ These writings were to form a large part of Foxe’s Acts and Monuments. Foxe was greatly indebted to Grindal and warmly acknowledged his appreciation for all that Grindal communicated to him as seen in the following extract:

Health in Christ! I received with your letter the narrative of Bradford, together with sundry of his letters addressed to different persons. I see, my Edmund, in this business, how faithful a performer of your promise you are, and (as they say) without fault. I would that we had all the rest of the martyrs’ remains collected with the same diligence. And as I do not doubt, but that (as you write) you still have a great farrago of these papers, so neither have I any distrust, that your vigilance and fidelity will be wanting in collecting the rest.

Grindal was sent to Frankfurt in 1554 to try to seek a resolution to the dissensions which existed among the English exiles. Two parties had emerged among the English Reformers at Frankfurt, the one wanting to use King Edward’s Book of Common Prayer in worship, the other wanting the services conducted in a manner similar to those in Geneva. The dissensions in Frankfurt were not resolved amicably.

On returning to England after his exile, Grindal was made bishop of London in 1559, and there executed a faithful office. He was ordained Archbishop of York in June 1568, and on 15th of February, 1575, became Archbishop of Canterbury. During this period he temporarily fell out of favour with Queen Elizabeth. The Queen did not like the meetings for discussion or ‘prophesyings’ conducted among the Puritan clergy. She also found issue with

their preaching and wanted Grindal to put an end to them. He however, declined and she responded by having him suspended from his jurisdictional functions. Grindal was reinstated towards the end of 1582. He died in office on July 6th, 1583, and was buried in the chancel of Croyden church.

Alymer’s Assistance to Foxe

John Alymer was born in Norfolk in 1521. Henry Grey, (later Duke of Suffolk), who was the father of Lady Jane, sponsored Alymer’s education at Cambridge. After graduating from Cambridge he became resident chaplain to the Duke of Suffolk and tutor to his daughters. John Alymer had been greatly affected by the teaching of Scripture at Cambridge and came to Bradgate with a mind and conscience awakened to these truths. Jane Grey responded in child-like manner to the warmth and kindness of her new tutor, and under his guidance her education flourished.

Alymer was appointed archdeacon of Stow in 1553, but within a year was living as an exile in Germany. While in exile he wrote a response to Knox’s *The First Blast of the Trumpet* against the Monstrous Regiment of Women entitled *An Harborowe for the Faithfull and Trewe Subjects*. In this he sought to defend a monarchy ruled by a woman. He was a great encouragement to Foxe, and assisted him in translating the Acts and Monuments into Latin. When he returned to England, Elizabeth appointed him as one of the Protestant disputants against seven Romanist divines. In 1573, Alymer became archdeacon of Lincoln, and in 1576, bishop of London. He died in 1594 and is buried in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

The Church at Frankfurt

While Foxe was continuing on the work of Acts and Monuments he was also taken up with the disputes among the English reformers at Frankfurt. (Among the exiles at Frankfurt was Bishop John Jewel, later bishop of Salisbury, who arrived there on March 13th, 1555, with Richard Cox and others. It was at Knox’s

request that Cox and his party [including Jewel], were granted admission to the church at Frankfurt.) Foxe's views on the form of church worship were in keeping with those at Geneva, and he was happy to have his name attached to letters with men such as John Knox, John Bale, William Whittingham and others. He was, however, greatly exercised by the division which existed within the congregation and did not see it as being consistent with Christian charity. In a letter to Peter Martyr, Foxe writes: 'I have discovered what otherwise I could not have believed, how much bitterness is to be found among those whom continual acquaintance with the sacred volume ought to render gentle, and to incline to all kindness. As far as in me lies, I persuade parties to concord.'

A compromise in this dispute was impossible. On March 26th, 1555, the Magistracy of Frankfurt granted permission to Cox to use the Prayer Book, which in effect brought an end to the Calvinistic Church and allowed for the formation of an Anglican Church. Shortly afterwards Knox was banished from the city. It would seem that the two main men behind Knox's removal were Edward Isaac of Kent, and Henry Parry, who had been chancellor of the cathedral at Salisbury.

During this time in exile, Foxe's health failed considerably. His son speaks of him as '...worn out and eaten up with cares, and even by the course of nature ruinous.' These were physically demanding days when Foxe and many others had little on which to subsist, often knowing daily want and the weariness associated with studying late into the night.

Queen Mary died on November 17th, 1558, and by her death deliverance was ushered in for the Protestants of England. As the persecution of Protestants was brought to an end, the exiles began to return home. Foxe, however, remained in Basle until 1559. There were a number of reasons why he

stayed. Finances were limited, and he may not have had sufficient resources to bring his wife and two sons home. He also had a means of employment which he was reluctant to relinquish. Perhaps, most importantly, he was supervising the early Latin edition of Acts and Monuments and needed to be at hand for this work.

When he eventually returned to London in October 1559, he had no means of support. He was constrained to write to one of his former pupils, the Duke of Norfolk, for assistance. The Duke's reply must have rejoiced Foxe's heart and caused him to give thanks to God for the provision made for him as the Duke warmly received him into his household. The Duke, however, was embroiled in political activities and engaged in secret correspondence with Mary, Queen of Scots. Despite Queen Elizabeth's high regard for him he was tried and executed in 1572. Foxe attended him on the scaffold and the Duke left Foxe a small pension.

Following the Duke's death, Foxe moved closer to John Day, the printer, in Aldersgate. John Day loved the teachings of the Reformed faith, and had become actively involved in printing the Scriptures during the reign of Edward VI. The list of books printed by Day includes all the important writings of that age. It is no wonder that Foxe entrusted him with the printing of his Acts and Monuments. Now that he was free to obtain information, he decided to write an extended version of the book and to translate it into English. He began traveling around the country, speaking to survivors, friends of the victims, and even spectators of the burnings.

Foxe also took copies of the letters that the martyrs had written to their families and friends, and of the official records of their interrogations in the bishops' registers. He liked to give the names, occupations, age, and the town or village of origin of the martyrs, as well as the places and dates of their martyrdoms, and details of their trials, burnings and

other sufferings; but he could not always find out all this information.

Elizabeth I was a Protestant, but wanted change in matters of religion to be authorised by law under her authority. She was not favourably disposed towards extremism or towards those who supported a Protestant revolution. She set herself forward as a queen of toleration, and moved cautiously in introducing religious change. Elizabeth had Matthew Parker appointed as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, and as they were like-minded he rapidly became her favourite.

Foxe was highly regarded by many in authority and could have advanced his ecclesiastical prospects if his views had been more in keeping with the established Church. He was opposed to anything suggestive of popery (especially the wearing of vestments which he declined to wear), and this disqualified him from holding any higher church office. He did, however, accept a prebend at Salisbury in 1564. A prebendary is defined as 'a post connected to an Anglican cathedral or collegiate church and is a type of canon. Prebendaries have a role in the administration of the cathedral. A prebend is a type of benefice, which usually consisted of the income from the cathedral estates.'

Jewel and Foxe

The bishop of Salisbury at the time of Foxe's appointment as prebendary was John Jewel. He had been appointed as bishop to the city in 1559. Jewel and Foxe had become acquainted during their years of exile.

It is of interest to note that William Hailer, in his book *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, sets forth the preaching of Bishop John Jewel and John Foxe as the standard to which many other preachers in the land aspired after the accession of Queen Elizabeth. Both reminded their hearers of the wonderful deliverance the Lord had procured

for them under their new Queen, at a time when England and the Church were threatened by so much danger. They both looked to God for the Queen's preservation and acknowledged her to be the means whereby the Scriptures would be declared in all their fullness to the spiritual redemption of the nation.

Even with such liberty in preaching granted by the Queen, Foxe was not without his concerns for how some issues were dealt with in government. We read of him pleading for the lives of two Dutch Protestants who were condemned to die in 1575 for views considered to be contrary to Christian teaching. This time he wrote to the Queen. He was very unwilling that the fires of Smithfield should be rekindled; he pleaded earnestly with the Queen, that the cruel practices introduced by the Popes might be laid aside, and that if punishment must be inflicted, it should not affect life. As previously, his request did not prevail with the authorities and both men were burned.

Acts and Monuments

The first edition of *Acts and Monuments* had been published the year before Foxe accepted the prebend at Salisbury Cathedral. It was dedicated to the 'most Christian and renowned princess, Queen Elizabeth.' Many people subsequently wrote to Foxe furnishing him with information and details which he had previously been unable to obtain. Others pointed out errors in the book. These things prompted him to prepare a second edition. Elizabeth did not like Foxe's account of her father, Henry VIII, and his treatment of Lambert. This information had to be withheld from the second edition, which was published in 1570. It undoubtedly had a powerful effect on the English people and is one of the few books which can be said to have changed the course of history. At Elizabeth's command, a copy of this edition was fastened by a chain in every cathedral. Many churches had copies placed in them also. Such copies stood as a reminder to the English people of

what would happen if England was ever again ruled by a Catholic sovereign.

Foxe was to see a further two editions of Acts and Monuments published in his life-time. The third edition, which was only slightly altered from the previous edition, was published in June 1576. The 1583 edition had the benefits of larger type and better paper.

The book was warmly received among the Protestants. Their hearts were greatly stirred with admiration and love for their brethren who suffered so much, and had yielded their bodies willingly to the fires of persecution rather than betray their Master by recanting. However, among the Papists it was severely attacked. One of their outspoken men was Thomas Harding. He had unscrupulously forsaken the Protestant faith, and now was among the first of the Papists to criticize the Book of Martyrs. In his writings against the works of Bishop Jewel of Salisbury, he included castigating remarks about Foxe and his Book of Martyrs. It was not long before many others in Rome sought to undermine this excellent work, but their attempts were all in vain. They could find no evidence to support their fallacious suggestions.

The value of Acts and Monuments to the Christian Church is inestimable, and can best be expressed in the words of Strype:

‘Herein Foxe hath done exquisite service to the protestant cause, in shewing, from abundance of ancient books, records, registers, and choice manuscripts, the encroachment of popes and papalins, and the stout oppositions made by learned and good men, in all ages, and in all countries, against them; and especially under King Henry and Queen Mary, here in England; preserving to us the memories of those holy men and women, those bishops and divines, together with their histories, acts, sufferings, and their constant deaths, willingly undergone for the sake of Christ and his Gospel,

and for refusing to comply with popish doctrines and superstitions.’

The Salisbury Martyrs

As we have seen, when Queen Mary Tudor ascended the throne as a Roman Catholic she soon made the strength of her beliefs all too evident. She first appointed as her principal advisor the Spanish Ambassador, Renard. Within three months, Mary had put on trial several evangelical Bishops and had begun in earnest the task which she had set herself: the removal of the Protestant Religion from England and its replacement with Roman Catholicism.

It was not long before the effects of Mary’s tragic reign were felt in Salisbury. The use of the 1552 Prayer Book was forbidden by the end of 1553, altars were restored, and masses were again said. On July 24th, 1554, Queen Mary married Philip of Spain and within six months the fires of the first martyrs were burning. One of the Commission of Bishops appointed to persecute ‘heretics’ was John Capon, Bishop of Salisbury. Having sent numerous well known believers to the stake elsewhere in England, it is not surprising that Capon would not hesitate to do the same to men of humble rank in his own diocese of Salisbury. It fell principally to Foxe to leave a record of this period of persecution in Salisbury.

On the 24th March, 1556, (three days after Archbishop Cranmer was burned), three men were burned at the stake in Salisbury. Their names were John Maundrel (a farmer), William Coberley (a tailor), and John Spicer (a stonemason).

John Maundrel's Testimony

John Maundrel is the only one of the three of whom much is known. He had been converted after the publication of Tyndale’s Bible (1525,) and although he could not read, he knew by heart most of his New Testament and constantly carried it with him for the benefit of those who could read. Foxe said of Maundrel that ‘he delighted in nothing so much as

to hear and speak of God's word'. His conversation and living were described by Foxe as 'honest and charitable'.

John Maundrel had previously suffered for his faith during the reign of King Henry VIII, twenty years previously. At this time he had spoken against certain Roman Catholic additions such as holy water and holy bread, and for this he was sentenced to be publicly humiliated in Devizes. Maundrel had gone into hiding at the beginning of the reign of Mary Tudor, though he later returned home to Bulkington to his wife and children and there enjoyed fellowship with Spicer and Coberley.

A Witness at Keevil

Maundrel, Coberley, and Spicer went one day to the parish church at Keevil (near Trowbridge). There the three, when they saw parishioners following an idol, advised the people rather to follow the living God. The vicar then began to pray for deceased souls in purgatory, and at this John Maundrel audibly denounced the doctrine of purgatory, the other two friends affirming his words. Maundrel declared that purgatory was 'the Pope's pinfold' (a pinfold was a pound for stray cattle). For this the vicar ordered that they be put in the stocks, and the next day they were carried to Salisbury, where they were imprisoned in Fisherton gaol. Here they were examined privately on a number of occasions by Bishop John Capon and W. Jeffrey, chancellor of the diocese.

The Martyrs Tried

The final examination of the Salisbury martyrs on March 23rd, 1556, was conducted in the old Parish Church of Fisherton Anger, which has since been demolished. It has been replaced by the present St Paul's Church, built a little distance away. The three men made an evangelical profession of faith before their accusers. Foxe gives the following description of this profession: 'they believed in God the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost, the twelve

articles of the creed, the holy Scripture, from the first of Genesis to the last of Revelation.' They refused to subscribe to the Romanist doctrines which were put to them. These doctrines included Transubstantiation, to which they answered, "the Popish mass was abominable idolatry and injurious to the blood of Christ," and the use of images to which John Maundrel replied, "wooden images were good to roast a shoulder of mutton".

After their examination, the men were condemned by the chancellor and delivered to the Sheriff, St. John, to be executed. John Spicer addressed the Sheriff with the following words: "Oh, master sheriff, now must you be their butcher, that you may be guilty also with them of innocent blood before the Lord." Two stakes were erected for the burning, at a spot near the present St Paul's roundabout at the beginning of Wilton Road. (A plaque recalling this event is found nearby, on the wall of Emmanuel Church.)

The Martyrdom

Foxe describes the martyrdom as follows:

'On coming to the place, they kneeled down, and offered their prayers secretly together, and being undressed to their shirts, John Maundrel spoke with a loud voice "Not for all Salisbury," which words men judged to be an answer to the sheriff, who offered him the Queen's pardon if he would recant. After that in like manner spake John Spicer, saying, "This is the most joyful day that ever I saw." Thus were these three godly men burned at two stakes, where most constantly they gave their bodies to the fire and their souls to the Lord, for testimony of his truth.'

Others who Suffered

These three men were not the only ones to suffer for their faith in Salisbury, although they are the best known. Some years previously, in 1541, during the reign of King Henry VIII, an ex-priest called Richard

Spencer and two others - Ramsey and Hewet - were burned for their views on the mass.

Towards the end of the reign of Mary Tudor (in 1558), John Hunt and Richard White were imprisoned, examined, and eventually condemned by Chancellor Jeffrey. Bishop Capon was dead by the time that sentence was passed and Queen Mary was in her final illness. Before the sentence of death could be carried out, Chancellor Jeffrey and Queen Mary both died and White and Hunt were released. Mary could martyr no more in Salisbury.

The account of the Salisbury Martyr's illustrates the hatred which unbelievers have of Christ, and how they can express this when circumstances allow. The boldness of those who died is also very notable and was exhibited both before and after their condemnation. There were other Christians who lived through these times yet these bold martyrs, in their death, both glorified Christ by their faith and greatly helped the cause of the Gospel in Salisbury.

Foxe's Death

Although Foxe spent many years working on the Book of Martyrs, he did not neglect his other duties. He had a love for souls and sought to do good to all whom he came into contact with. When the plague broke out in London in 1563, many deserted their duties, but Foxe went out of his way to help

the needy and to encourage those in high places to give generously to relieve the misery of others. It was not long before his strength was weakened and those that knew him feared for his well-being. He grew emaciated and altered in appearance but was reluctant to give up his labours. He pressed towards the Kingdom with zeal and steadfastness.

Foxe departed this world and entered into his Master's presence on April 18th, 1587, in his seventieth year. Unusually, he died without having the comforts of his family by his bedside. One of his sons, Samuel, saw this as an act of design by his father, and lamented the lack of opportunity to fulfil his last duties to him, and of witnessing an exemplary death in Christ.

Foxe's testimony is of a man who glorified God and served his nation, 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season' (Heb 11:25). He was willing to 'spend and be spent' (2 Cor 12:15) for the cause of Christ, knowing that the servant is not above his Master. Foxe's trials and afflictions were great, but by grace he proved the faithfulness of a covenant keeping God, and received of Him '... the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him' (James 1:12).