THE MARIAN MARTYRS

and the Reformation in Bristol

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Mr. K. G. Powell is a graduate of the University of London and has been engaged in research under Professor A. G. Dickens on the early history of the Reformation. He has held a Research Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research and has also worked on the project for a new History of the University of Oxford. He contributed an article on 'The Beginnings of Protestantism in Gloucestershire' to the *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, vol. xc, 1972, and a further article on the social background of the Reformation in Gloucestershire will appear in a future issue of the *Transactions*.

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by K. G. POWELL

In the first half of the sixteenth century, the prosperity and prestige of Bristol rested on its long-established position as a major centre of local, regional, and international trade. This trade was probably not growing in volume, but the town was still, above all, a great port[1]. A Tudor preacher declared that the key to Bristol's wealth lay in the courage and enterprise of the sailor and the merchant: "if for one storme or twayne, or one losse or twayne, he should abhorre and giue of goyng to the sea, there would at the last no man aventure to the seas, and then farewell this citye of Bristowe"[2] . . . The preacher was Roger Edgeworth, a frequent occupant of Bristol pulpits in the reigns of Henry VIII and Mary and an informative (if partisan) witness to the progress of the Reformation in the town. Edgeworth, a staunch conservative who held prebends at Bristol and Wells, argued that the spread of Protestantism would harm the commercial life of Bristol: "I haue knowen manye in this towne, that studienge diuinitie, hath kylled a marchaunt, and some of other occupations by theyr busy labours in the Scriptures, hath shut up the shoppe windowes".[3]

Bristol's trade had ceased to expand long before the accession of Henry VIII and its eventual recovery and diversification was not impaired by the almost universal acceptance of the Protestant faith in the reign of Elizabeth. The Tudor period saw radical change in the fields of religion, education, and culture. New schools, almshouses, and charities were founded and literacy grew. Merchants began to possess and read books of all types: as early as the 1540's a "boke bynder" could make a good living. Dramatic

1. J. W. Sherborne, *The Port of Bristol in the Middle Ages* (Bristol: Historical Association, 1971), p. 28.
2. R. Edgeworth, *Sermons very fruitfull, godly and learned* (London 1557) sigs. Div-Dii.
3. Ibid. sig. Kiiiv.

performances became a fairly regular feature of civic life. In the reign of Mary, the Earl of Oxford's players and the "kinge and quene's Majesties players" were among visiting companies.[1] Sermons, often endowed by prominent men, became an increasingly important, and sometimes controversial, ingredient of religious life. These developments were proceeding alongside the gradual spread of Protestant doctrines (which had found initial support among University scholars and the radical clergy). In the 1550's, the English Protestant movement was numerically small and dependent on Government support. The Marian martyrdoms were the most dramatic aspect of a serious attempt to destroy English Protestantism and bring the Counter-Reformation to England. The failure of Queen Mary and her counsellors to achieve these ends was the inevitable result of a reaction which combined spiritual sterility with cruel persecution on a scale unknown in England. The burnings and deprivations of the years 1554-58 were the last bitter acts of Roman Catholicism as a majority faith in England.

In the Henrician period, the medieval Catholic culture of Bristol retained its vitality. There had been no church-building of note since 1500 in the town, but pious Bristolians continued to invest money in new furnishings and decorations. Civic rituals were closely bound up with the Catholic faith: masses and processions accompanied feasts and other functions. On the eve of All Hallows, evensong at All Saints' was followed by "ffyres and drynkyngs with spiced Cakebrede" at "the Maire's place".[2] In an England where the religious life had largely ceased to command much respect, a number of Bristol men and women left money and other gifts in their wills to the various friaries. But the 1530's saw the breakdown of this happy situation, where social convention and the power of the law had been the twin supports of orthodoxy. Even before 1530, heretical books had been secretly sold.[3] A few years later, the heads of the Dominican and Franciscan convents denounced each other from their pulpits, the prior of the Blackfriars, William Oliver, having been converted to Lutheranism.[4] In 1531, the Church authorities condemned the will of a recently deceased Bristolian, Thomas Brown, because of its omission of the usual references to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin and saints (thus implying belief in the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone).[5] Within ten years, wills of this type became common

1. Mayor's Audits, VI, 1557 (Bristol Archives Office) p.38.
2. *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar* (by Robert Ricart) ed. L. T. Smith, Camden Society, New Series, V, London, 1872, p.79.
3. Thomas More, *English Works* (London, 1557) pp.727-28.
4. *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (L&P) ed. J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie (London, 1862-1932), XII(1), 508, 1147.
5. J. Wilkins, *Concilia . . .* (London, 1737), III, pp.746-47.

amongst the merchant class. David Hutton (who died in 1535) omitted all mention of the invocations of the saints. His will (which was proved without ecclesiastical objections) was witnessed by two clerics recently chosen by bishop Hugh Latimer of Worcester as his chaplains.[1] Hutton's mother, mistress Alice (the widow of a merchant), died in 1537. She left no provision in her testament for the usual masses and alms, but prefaced it with a declaration of her "hole trust" in the merits of Christ's passion.[2] Ralph Leche, a salt merchant who died in 1539, held similar views. He was furthermore to be buried without "pompe" with rites as simple as the ordinances of the Church would allow.[3] John Shipman (died 1543) prefaced his testament: "I commende my soule vnto Christ Jesu, my maker and redemer, in whom and by the merits of whose blissed passion is all my hole trust of clene remission and forgevenes of all my synnes." His funeral was to be carried out "without any pompe or pride of the folly of this world".[4] By 1550, the majority of Bristol merchants (and a high proportion of people from other classes) were making wills in this manner. Some adhered firmly to the old notions: Thomas Harte, a merchant who died in 1540, bequeathed money to various churches for the enriching of altars and specified for himself elaborate funeral obsequies.[5] Nevertheless, of 22 wills for the period 1545-63 entered in the Great Orphan Book of Bristol, only 4 employ the traditional terminology; 6 omit mention of the Virgin and saints without specifying belief in the Protestant view of salavation, while 12 are thoroughly "reformed" in tone. The decline in the popular faith in Purgatory had a wide impact. Chantries had been a genuinely popular institution. In 1530, Margaret Gerves, a wealthy widow from the Temple parish, had left the large sum of £40 to hire a chantry priest.[6] Investment in chantry masses had begun to decline long before the idea of suppression was first discussed seriously. Bristol citizens sought more lasting memorials—endowed sermons, increased alms-giving on a better organised basis, schools. However, the Thornes, founders of Bristol Grammar School, were religious conservatives. Protestantism was not the sole cause of increased concern for education and social welfare.

The fact that Bristol was very much divided over the religious and political issues first raised in the 1530's is demonstrated clearly

1. Prerogative Court of Canterbury Wills in the Public Record Office (P.C.C. Wills) 30 Hogen.
2. *Ibid.* 26 Dyngeley.
3. *Ibid.* 13 Alenger.
4. *Ibid.* 21 Spert.
5. *Ibid.* 29 Alenger.
6. *Wells Wills* ed. F. W. Weaver (London, 1890), pp.24-25.

by the events of 1533.[1] In that year, Hugh Latimer, although invited to preach in several churches, had to contend with suspicion and hostility. He had the support of the Mayor, Clement Bays, and others, but he was opposed from the start by most of the clergy. He was already well-known as the leader of a party in Church and State whose demands for radical reform were based on ideas clearly heretical in terms of prevailing Catholic orthodoxy. In his Bristol sermons, Latimer attacked the veneration of saints (especially the Blessed Virgin Mary), pilgrimages and shrines, Purgatory and regard for ceremonies in general.

Complaints that the people were being "infected" led to the introduction to the town of a number of orthodox preachers. Among the latter was Roger Edgeworth, who attacked in forthright terms the "heretiks that soweth cocle & yl sedes among the corne, settyng forth sectes and diuisions".[2] Another preacher, William Hubberdin, declared that there were 20 or 30 heretics in Bristol who backed Latimer. The fact that he and another conservative, Edward Powell, went on to make treasonable statements about the King's Divorce probably strengthened Latimer's position.

Among the patrician class, there was no apparent opposition to the Henrician Revolution. The suppression of the religious foundations was accepted without protest: William Chester bought the old Franciscan house and laid out a bowling-lawn in the cloister.[3] The aldermen of Bristol, anxious to retain the goodwill of Thomas Cromwell, elected him their Recorder. Conservative ideas, still held by many of the townspeople, were later voiced most strongly by priests and men of a lower social class. The wealthier merchants endeavoured at all times to adhere (at least in public) to the prevalent religion of the State and to accept legislative change without a murmur of dissent.

Nevertheless, at this period, Protestant doctrines were still highly controversial. A Commission set up by Cromwell to investigate the events of 1533 was very critical of Latimer for the division he caused: even zealous protestants feared the unleashing of anarchic forces amongst the lower orders. The civic authorities had in any case always been held responsible for the extirpation of "all maner heresies and errours, clepid openly lolladries."[4] Nevertheless, in England ideas once punishable by Church courts

1. These are the subject of letters and other documents in *L&P*, VI; see especially 246-47, 433, 572-73, 799.
2. Edgeworth, *Sermons* . . . sig.Ev.
3. Chester was a sometime Mayor of Bristol.
4. Ricart's *Kalendar* pp.71-72.

had become common and even legal. Indiscreet support for doctrinal novelty could be a disadvantage for those Bristolians engaged in trade with Catholic lands. A young merchant, Hugh Tipton, voiced in Spain his convictions about the Papacy and was compelled to make humiliating public penance.[1] Another Bristol man, William Gardiner, a seaman, was burned for attacking the mass while visiting Portugal.[2] Gardiner's views could well have brought him to the stake in Bristol, where the authorities feared the influence of extremists, especially those who lacked official recognition. In 1539, the civil powers supported the clergy in silencing the Protestant preacher George Wishart, who had fled from Scotland. Wishart had supporters among the mass of the citizens, and bills containing attacks in crude language on priests and prominent men appeared on walls throughout the town.[3]

Throughout the Tudor period the ruling class of Bristol collaborated with successive governments in the imposition of civil and religious conformity. In the reign of Mary, the civic officers assisted in the arrest and execution of heretics as well as the suppression of sedition. The unpopularity of the burnings gave rise to calls for the punishment of those laymen involved, but none of those implicated were punished in any way. The accusers were mainly Protestant clerics who lacked both understanding and sympathy for patrician attitudes. Few men of substance had been zealous supporters of the Marian regime or religion, but stable government and the maintenance of commerce were ideals with an attraction as potent for some as that of any religious ideology. The religion of the merchants of Bristol, despite the strongly held views of individuals, was, by and large, the religion of the State, of the existing regime.

The development of Protestantism, a phenomenon common to all classes of society in the middle decades of the sixteenth century, has been shown above with respect to a small minority of Bristol's population of 10-12,000. Social divisions, while surmountable by ambitious men, were clearly visible. It is generally accepted that the martyrs of Mary's reign, as in the rest of England, were mostly drawn from the lower orders of society, the craftsmen, labourers, artisans, and seamen who constituted the majority of the population of Tudor Bristol. These groups, who possessed no direct role in civic administration, had long been subject to radical religious influences. The heresies of John Wyclif had been preached in Bristol in the reformer's lifetime, and in 1413 a large local con-

1. *L&P*, XII(2), 716.
2. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* . . . (*A&M*) ed. G. Townsend (London, 1843-49), VI, p.277.
3. Ricart's *Kalendar* p.55; *L&P*, XIV(1), 184.

tingent had marched to the support of Sir John Oldcastle.[1] After the failure of the rebellion, Lollardy, branded as a socially subversive faith, continued to exist in secret, drawing adherents from those who lacked power, education and wealth but were attracted to its anti-hierarchical tenets. Heretical ideas, conveniently classifiable as "Lollard", continued to circulate in Bristol throughout the fifteenth century. The occasional proceedings in Church courts revealed that local heretical groups had links with men of like mind in other areas—the cloth-producing districts of Wiltshire and Somerset, the Midland industrial towns, the Thames Valley and London. Those accused in Bristol included carpenters, smiths, and cloth-workers. In the years 1498-1501 there was a series of prosecutions for heresy in the Redcliffe area. Among the Redcliffe heretics brought to trial and abjuration were John Bouwney and his son (of the same name), both weavers, who recanted heterodox opinions relating to the worship of images and the nature of the divine presence in the mass. The denial of the Eucharistic presence was a central Lollard doctrine and other prosecutions followed, the last recorded during those years being that of John Amys, a dyer, in 1501.[2] Some ten years later, a Birmingham man, prosecuted for heresy by the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, revealed that he knew a number of Bristol men, including a carpet-maker and a wire-drawer. He admitted that the chief doctrine of the Bristol group had always been that "the sacrament of thaltar is not the very body of our Lorde but materiall brede".[3] Residual Lollard heresy forms a background to the Reformation in Bristol.

A variety of highly unorthodox beliefs (often expressed in the crudest terms) were circulating long before the arrival of Protestant preachers, whose efforts may have served to strengthen the faith of those who had already rejected Catholicism. Organised dissenting groups may well have existed from time to time throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. Protestantism made important gains among the clergy and the merchant class, but popular support for Protestant preachers may have been stimulated by the Wyclifite tone of their preaching, which was initially very much an assault on the outward trappings of religion. Protestantism, as preached intensively in Bristol in the reign of Edward VI, could mean different things to different men. The "sarcastic letters" disseminated in 1539 represent the voice of popular, anti-hierarchical heresy, the faith of a godly minority striving against an evil and blasphemous authority. Men and women who made no material

1. For a survey of Lollardy in the Bristol area, J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards* (Oxford, 1965), pp.20-51, esp. pp.46-47.
2. *Ibid.* passim.
3. *Ibid.* p.47.

gains from the Reformation (the basic theology of which they may never have fully comprehended) were genuinely excited at the advent of the English Bible. The reading and discussion of the Scriptures gave a sense of discovery and new power to the uneducated layman (who might still be reliant on the teaching and reading of a literate few). The prevalence of popular heresy was a major element in the foundation of a genuinely popular Protestantism.

When Henry VIII's government sought to restrain the progress of the Reformation in the years 1539-40, prosecutions of those who denied the Eucharistic presence followed inevitably. The bishops were ordered to suppress "sacramentarian" groups and were to concentrate on the known centres of heresy, one of which was Bristol.[1] Little evidence survives of any serious attempt to root out local heretics at this period. However, in 1541 Robert Jordeyn, alias Bowyer, of Bristol, appeared in the court of bishop Bell of Worcester after declaring publicly that "no man coulde se God & lyve"—a familiar (if somewhat oblique) slur against the doctrine of the mass. The evidence against Jordeyn suggests his affiliation to a dubiously orthodox discussion group, which had met "in a celer of one Patrick's in Bristoll".[2] The denial of the mass, the central issue in all Lollard trials, was to be the ground on which those executed in Mary's reign were condemned to burn.

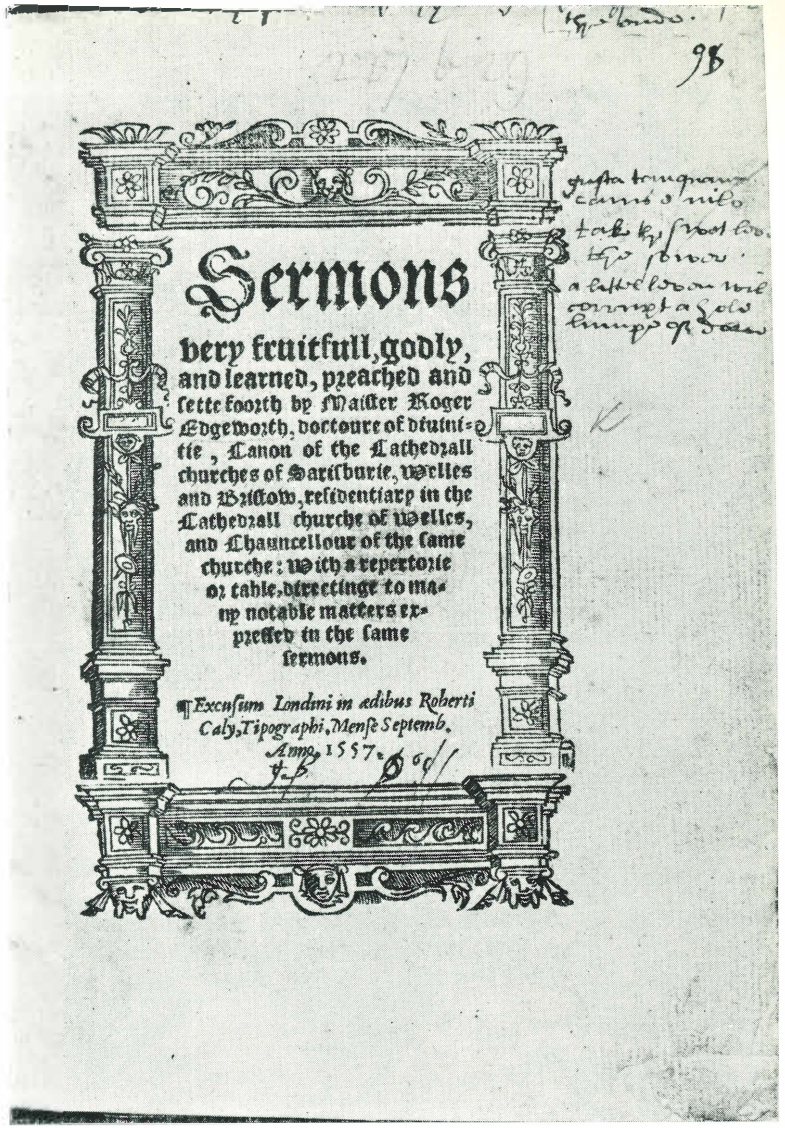
Alongside the vigorous heretical tradition (which had never had the support of a majority of any social class) there existed in Bristol a powerful "backlash" of religious conservatism, often based on genuine piety and attachment to traditional beliefs. In 1536, a Bristol youth, John Scurfield, had been causing trouble in the town in his eagerness "to have them punished which were bruted to deny the sacrament".[3] Prophecies predicting the downfall of the Kingdom circulated. Various persons were prosecuted for defend- in the Pilgrimage of Grace.[4] Among them was William Glaskeryon, a pewterer, who had said of Latimer: "I wish he had never been born; I trust or I die to see him brent".[5] Glaskeryon, a pious and fanatical Catholic, was among the town's independent master craftsmen—a group which also produced a good proportion of those convicted of Lollard heresy. Those who opposed religious change could expect support from many of the local clergy. In 1533, John Floke, a prominent Bristol cleric, was suspected of treason

1. Register of Archbishop Cranmer (Lambeth Palace Library) fo.68.
2. Visitation Book of Bishop John Bell (Worcestershire Record Office, 802. BA 2764), p.117.
3. *L&P*, XI, 778.
4. *L&P*, XII(1), 508, 1147.
5. *Ibid.* 1147.

because of his opposition to the Divorce.[1] In the years 1536-37 there were reports that several priests had attacked bishop Latimer for his "heresy".[2] Several were imprisoned for short periods. Protestantism spread slowly among the town clergy, who formed a constant factor in an era of change. Anti-clericalism stemmed largely from lay dislike of the privileged position of the clergy and especially from resentment at tithes and other dues. But in 1539, the supporters of Wishart denounced the clergy for their religious views—they were "hard hearted knavys" who loathed the Scriptures expounded by that preacher.

Professor Elton rightly asserts that Bristol "was not 'reformed' in the continental sense" by 1539.[3] During the reign of Edward VI, the situation may not have changed drastically. Reformed doctrines were preached more energetically and all the churches were quick to observe the changes in worship, local Calendars asserting that all images were rapidly destroyed. St. Werburgh's church bought a "new boke of the order sett forthe" for 4/- in March 1549. Soon after, the altars were smashed and the rood was sawn up.[4] The Communion was administered from a plain wooden table. This parish contained among its leading men some zealous Protestants, including the Shipman family and the Prynnes, several of whom had been educated at Oxford. But other parishes were equally eager to obey the King's ordinances. The attitude of church-wardens and clergy to the changes is impossible to gauge. Within a few years, the wardens of St. Werburgh's had to pay out money for the replacement of goods and plate either destroyed or seized by the Edwardian règime. A painter was called in and paid 5/- "for puttinge owt of the scripture on the walls". Bristol's bishop, Paul Bushe, tenant of the see from 1542 to 1554, was not an enthusiastic reformer. When deprived for marriage, Bushe, by then a widower, became rector of Winterbourne, where he wrote a defence of the mass and died in 1558.[5] The sum effect of the various influences at work in Bristol in the 1540's and early '50's seems to have been to produce deep religious divisions. Roger Edgeworth expressed his concern for Catholic unity in a sermon preached early in Mary's reign: "Here among you in this citie som wil heare masse, some will heare none by theyr good wils, som wil be Shriuen, some wil not, but for feare, or els for shame, some wyll pay tithes & offeringes, som wil not, in that wors that

1. *L&P*, VI, 572.
2. *L&P*, XII(1), 1147; the principal offenders were John Kene of Christchurch and John Rawlins of St. Ewen's.
3. G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police* (Cambridge, 1972), p.119.
4. Church-wardens' Accounts of St. Werburgh, Bristol (Bristol Archives Office) *passim*.
5. *Dictionary of National Biography* (*D.N.B.*) *sub nomine*.



Sermons of Roger Edgeworth, one of the leading protagonists in the religious disputes in Bristol.

have been brought before Dalby on 8 August 1556 and then condemned to burning "for holding that the sacrament was a sign of a holy thing; also he denied that the flesh and blood of Christ is there after their words of consecration." The date of execution is given as 18 September 1556. Vivid details are given of the execution which suggest that Foxe's informant was actually present at St. Michael's Hill on that day. As Saxton went to the stake, he sang psalms. The Sheriff of Bristol, John Griffith, "had prepared green wood to burn him, but one master John Pikes, pitying the man, caused divers to go with him to Ridland half a mile off, who brought good store of helm sheaves, which indeed made good dispatch with little pain in comparison with that he should have suffered with the green wood." As long as he was able, Saxton "made many good exhortations to the people" and at the last died "with great joyfullness."

Another weaver, Richard Sharpe of Redcliffe, appeared before Dalby on 9 March 1556. When charged with holding various heretical opinions, he recanted them and was then released. Some months later, Sharpe "decayed and changed" by the weight of his conscience, resolved to make a bold declaration of his faith. He "came into his parish church, called Temple, and, after High Mass, came to the quire door and said with a loud voice, "Neighbours, bear me record that yonder idol (and pointed to the altar) is the greatest and most abominable that ever was, and I am sorry that ever I denied my Lord God." None of the congregation attempted to seize Sharpe (some may have sympathised with his views) but he was later arrested, apparently by John Stone, now Sheriff. Brought before the vicar-general, he was automatically condemned to death for relapse and died "denying the sacrament of the altar to be the body and blood of Christ" and calling it an "idol". The date of his martyrdom is given as May 7 1557. A shoemaker, Thomas Hale, suffered at the same time for similar beliefs, including the conviction that the Eucharist was an "idol". Here again the narrative suggests a first-hand knowledge of events. Hale had apparently been involved in some personal or business dispute with a prominent citizen, alderman David Harris. The latter, knowing of Hale's unorthodoxy, came to arrest him in company with John Stone on the night of Maundy Thursday 1557. They "caused him to rise out of his bed and brought him forth of his door, to whom the said Thomas Hale said, "You have sought my blood these two years and now much good do it you with it". Hale confessed his heretical views but refused to recant them and was condemned. David Harris was alive for many years after the publication of *Acts and Monuments* . . . and died in 1583. The reaction of local people to the part played by various substantial men in the persecution

is uncertain. The religious beliefs of the latter are also unknown. John Stone, Sheriff in 1557, was related to Edmund Campion, the Catholic martyr, and helped him when he got into trouble over religion at Oxford.[1] But when Stone died he couched his will in Protestant terms and left cash for the preaching of sermons by John Northbrooke, a noted Puritan preacher and vicar of Henbury.[2] The eagerness of the authorities to suppress heresy may have led to a number of malicious accusations based on personal spite. In 1556, one Margaret Willis brought charges of "heretical pravity" against Joan Foxe but no official charges resulted.[3]

The last of the Bristol martyrs named by Foxe is Thomas Benion, a weaver burned 27 August 1557 for declaring that "there was nothing but bread in the sacrament". When questioned, Benion admitted to the validity of but two sacraments—baptism and the Eucharist. In this his views accorded well with those of the Elizabethan Church—Foxe was always eager to make of the Marian victims a suitable set of martyrs for English Protestantism. Some of those burned may have acquired ideas from Protestant sermons, but the emphasis in all the cases on the Eucharistic presence and on the rituals of the Church suggest that Protestantism had added little to established heresies prevalent in the town for over a century. None of those burned made a defence of justification by faith or the English Scriptures. Had such evidence existed, Foxe would certainly have used it to support his general case for the inclusion of all Lollard martyrs in a Protestant tradition.

If Foxe had local informants in Bristol, this would accord with his usual practice. Most of Foxe's correspondents were enthusiastic and accurate, and he must have had friends in Bristol. He certainly knew Richard Webb, a Chipping Sodbury man who had lived in Bristol for a long period and had distributed Protestant books there.[4] Some research into the Bristol burnings had also been done by Thomas Brice, who produced a rapid account of the Marian martyrs for publication in 1559. Unfortunately, Brice's narrative is sketchy and probably based on third-hand information. Brice notices under August 1556, that "the weauer at Bristow died" —possibly a reference to Saxton. For September he gives a very confused account:

> When Rauensdale and two brethren more,
> To earthly ashes were consumed,

1. I am grateful for this information to Mr. Patrick McGrath.
2. P.C.C. Wills; 32 Pyckering (dated 23rd June, 1575).
3. Bristol Diocese Cause Books (Bristol Archives Office) 2, 1556, p.6.
4. J. F. Mozley, *John Foxe and his Book* (London, 1940), p.164; see above, note 3.

A godly glouer would not adore,
Their filthie Idoll, whereat they fumed,
When he at Bristow was put to death,
We wisht for our Elizabeth.[1]

The author seems to confuse events in Bristol with the burning of Ravensdale and others at Mayfield in Sussex about the same time.

More reliable than Brice (but far more confusing) are the accounts of the period in the various MS Calendars drawn up by enterprising, and usually anonymous, local historians between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The most famous of these is that begun in the fifteenth century by Robert Ricart and carried on after his death by various hands.[2] This is very unreliable for the Tudor period and contains no information on the burnings. Other Calendars were used by Samuel Seyer in the preparation of his *Memoirs of Bristol* . . . Seyer's account is somewhat confusing as he apparently felt obliged to cite narratives from a number of sources, not all of which are now available, and probably doubted the reliability of some of them. He was probably right to do so. The first Calendar quoted by Seyer notes the burning of a "William Shapten or Shapman" burnt in 1555 (a confusion with Saxton?). A second Calendar mentions the execution of a weaver, a cobbler, and a shearman on St. Michael's Hill in 1556—no names are given. Another account cited mentions Edward Sharpe, "an ancient man of threescore, a Wiltshire man born", and refers also to a carpenter. A final record gives details of the 1557 martyrs: Richard Sharpe and Thomas Hale, burned 7 May 1557, Thomas Benion, "burned Aug' 27, 1556"—there seems to be a simple misprint in the last date.[3] In effect, Seyer's account serves to support that of Foxe, even allowing for the deduction from it of a few extra victims. None of the surviving Calendars adds much to Seyer's presentation. Adams's *Chronicle* (probably seventeenth century in date) mentions no martyrs. Two eighteenth century MSS., possibly continuations or copies of earlier accounts, refer to Saxton as "Shapton" and give the date of execution as 17 October 1555. They record that a weaver and a cobbler were burned in 1556 and that a shearman was burnt in the same year "for denying the Sacrament of the Altar to be the very body and blood of Christ really and substancially" . . .[4]

One later account which does add new material to the judicious

1. T. Brice, *A Briefe Register in Meter* . . . (London, 1599) sig. B2.
2. The edition by L. T. Smith (see above, note 5) is a reasonably accurate transcription of the MS. in the Bristol Archives Office.
3. S. Seyer, *Memoirs of Bristol* . . . (Bristol, 1821), I, p.234.
4. The MSS. (Bristol Archives Office) are 'A Calendar History of Bristol: 1067-1724" (ref. 07831) and "Annals of Bristol, 1067-1718" (ref. 22156).

account of Samuel Seyer is Nicholls and Taylor's *Bristol Past and Present* (1881). The authors had made use of a Calendar "once the property of Henry Mugleworth, who was the sword-bearer in the last years of the 17th century." This document supposedly contained the information that "William Shapton" *and* a woman, Rose Pencell, were burned on 17 October 1555. The name of the latter does not occur in any other source. Otherwise the account in Mugleworth's Calendar seems to have followed other Calendars closely; for 1556, the weaver, cobbler, and shearman are named.[1] Nicholls and Taylor suggest that there were seven Bristol martyrs: Shapton and Pencell and the five men named by Foxe. The effect of all these accounts must be to confuse the reader. None of them can be regarded as entirely accurate. Foxe lacked direct local knowledge, while the fact that all those Calendars which survive date from later periods must be given due significance.

In fact, a contemporary local account of the Bristol heresy trials does survive, at least in part. While the registers, act-books, and other records of the diocese of Bristol for the Tudor period have mostly vanished, the historian is fortunate in having available two Cause Books (now in the Bristol Archives Office) containing details of charges made in the episcopal courts in the years 1556 and 1557-58. Alongside a mass of evidence in moral and financial cases are details of solemn charges of heresy made against William Saxton and Richard Sharpe. Accusations against Saxton are dated August 1556. A number of entries relating to this case suggest that Foxe's account was inevitably somewhat telescoped. Saxton appeared first on 9 August. He admitted his refusal to receive the Eucharist at the last Easter and was ordered to re-appear. The next entry (partly obliterated) seems to refer to this hearing, when Saxton was faced with a series of charges relating to heresy. These were put to him by Dr. Dalby. He was charged that he, a subject in spiritual matters of John, bishop of Bristol, had held, defended, and affirmed that the Holy Eucharist was not the true body of Christ but material bread alone. Saxton's next appearance (27 August) ended with his answering "obstinately and maliciously" to the charges. The case was adjourned, a note being made that the accused had admitted that he believed the Eucharist to be just bread. He denied charges of possessing forbidden books, including an English New Testament. A particularly interesting accusation is that Saxton had frequented "illicit conventicles" and had engaged in discussions with suspect persons. On 28 August, Saxton again appeared on charges of "heretical pravity": he refused to

1. J. F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present* (Bristol, 1881) I, p.248.

recant his views. A period of detention, interspersed with court appearances, was a process designed to allow the heretic ample opportunity for recantation. The determination of Saxton and others made it seem a futile and cynical proceeding. By the end of August 1556, the case against Saxton had been sufficiently proved. The court moved to the final stages. Having personally admitted that he held scandalous and erroneous opinions, which he had affirmed in public and in private on many occasions and which he refused to recant, the accused was *ipso facto* proved a heretic. The Cause Book records that he was solemnly excommunicated from the Church and all its sacraments. On 29 August 1556, Saxton made his last appearance and heard the definitive sentence of the court. He was ordered to be handed over to the secular arm for execution and was delivered to the civic authorities (represented by John Harris, Hugh Jones, and John Smith).[1] Saxton is not mentioned again in the Church records. The whole account accords well with that of Foxe and gives credence to his narrative.

In the case of Richard Sharpe, the dates given in the Court record are in accordance with the details in *Acts and Monuments* . . . Sharpe's heresy was constituted by his relapse into error after he had made a solemn and public abjuration of erroneous beliefs about the Eucharist. He had blasphemously and publicly called the divine and venerable sacrament an "idol" and had denied that it contained the very body and blood of Christ. All these facts were presented at Sharpe's first appearance in Court, but he was ordered to re-appear. At the next hearing, the facts of the case were re-iterated, including the reference to the mass as "an Idole". Sharpe was condemned as a relapsed and excommunicate heretic and, "for the unity of the Church and extirpation of heresies", a definitive sentence was pronounced. He was handed over to the civil authorities with a conventional (and meaningless) plea for mercy.[2] Again, there is nothing in the official record to contradict Foxe, in fact, the two accounts are complementary. Foxe's knowledge of Sharpe's outburst in Temple Church may well have come from an eye-witness, although the incident is not referred to specifically in the Cause Book.

Of the other martyrs named by Foxe, none occur in these records. The martyrologist may have made serious blunders about the Bristol martyrs (although, if he did, it is curious that they were not corrected in later editions of his great work). Edward Sharp may have been a confusion with Richard Sharpe, but the interesting details given in the cases of Hale and Benion make their

1. *Cause Book*, 1556, pp.4, 6-7, 8, 11.
2. *Ibid.* pp.42-43, 66.

existence seem very likely. Hale and Benion may be identified with the weaver and cobbler mentioned in local Calendars. Little can be said about the anonymous carpenter. In the end, it is impossible to make any definite conclusions about the number of the Bristol martyrs. There were at least four; there may have been more. Only Saxton and Richard Sharpe occur in the Cause Books; there may have been other ecclesiastical records of the Marian period, now lost, in which other cases were entered. Too little is known about the administration of the diocese in its early years.

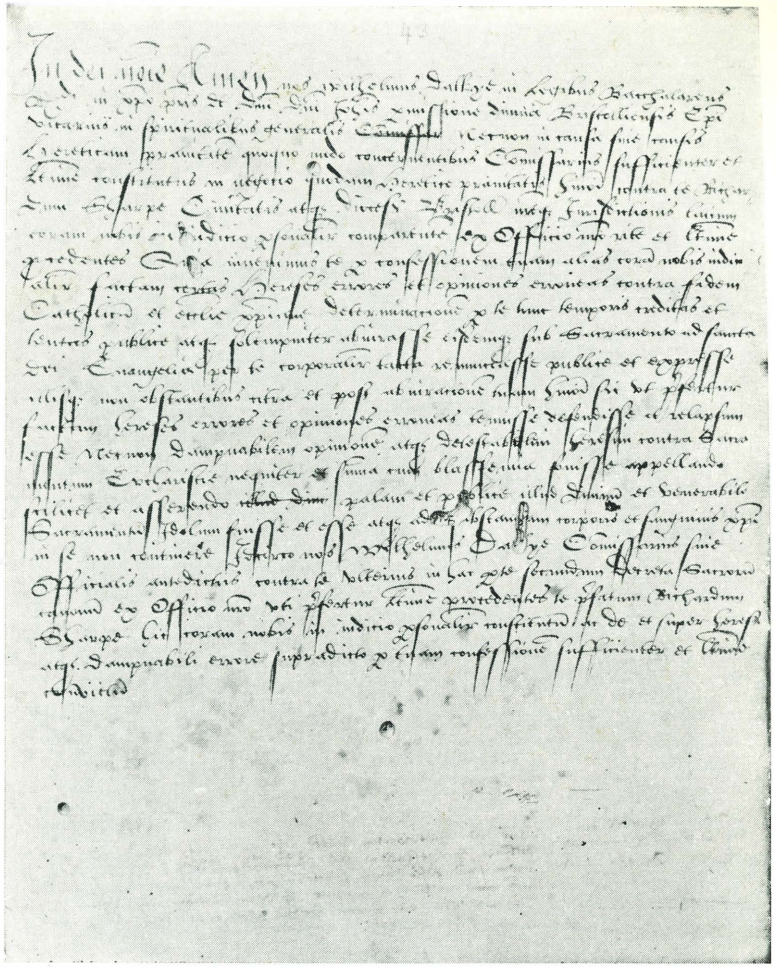
At the same time, it is difficult to generalise about the characters and beliefs of those who died. Certain general conclusions may be drawn from surviving evidence. All the Bristol victims were men outside the ruling class of the town and drawn mainly from the ranks of the artisans and craftsmen. There is a clear continuity of social background from the heretical groups in the city in say 1510 or even 1450. In Mary's reign, the vast majority of the victims throughout England were drawn from the same social groups. Cloth-workers were as prone to unorthodoxy as ever they had been and several weavers duly died for their beliefs in Bristol. No merchants were burned, although this does not imply that all the victims were men at the lowest level of society. The independence of the victims rested on their possession of useful skills. Richard Sharpe was possibly the most substantial man executed in the town. Sharpe was a master-weaver and was recorded in the civic records as a master of apprentices.[1] One may also fairly claim a continuity of beliefs from earlier Lollard groups. To suggest that the martyrs represented not Prayer Book Protestantism but "an older, more radical and more popular attack upon the Church"[2] is not to deny that Protestant ideas may have possessed a potent influence. But the Bristol martyrs died because of their implacable hatred for the hierarchical and ceremonial aspects of the Church. Their objections to the restoration of Catholicism became naturally centred on the revived mass—a magical act reserved for a priesthood set apart from the laity by celibacy and privilege. The supposed sacrifice of the mass represented (to the unorthodox) a gross usurping of Christ's role on the cross. The element of sacrifice had, on the other hand, been totally removed from the rite included in the Prayer Book, much to the disgust of conservatives. The revival of the claims of the priesthood brought about a revival of sacramentarian heresy. Roger Edgeworth had no doubt that the Eucharist was the chief point at which the Church was under attack: "so manye miscreauntes and

1. Book of Apprentices, 1532-65 (Bristol Archives Office) fos. 456v, 575.
2. A. G. Dickens, *The Marian Reaction in the Diocese of York* (York, 1957). II, p.4.

misbeliuers so little regarde the blessed and mooste reuerende Sacramente of the Aultare . . . as though Christe were not able by his Godly power to make, of breade and wine, his owne fleshe and bloude, and to geue power to a priest by his wordes to dooe the same likewise" . . .[1] The Privy Council was convinced that a "neste" of "malefactours" (possibly religious dissenters) existed in Bristol and ordered the Mayor to suppress it.[2] The well established heretical traditions of the town were quite capable of producing martyrs without the influence of Protestantism. William Saxton's notion that the Eucharist was a "sign" of Christ may indicate a nodding acquaintance with Protestant theology or merely Lollard rationalism. Similarly, Bristolians who assisted the Protestant bishop of Bath and Wells in his attempted flight from Bristol by sea may have been acting rather from financial motives than from sympathy for Williams Barlow's beliefs.[3]

Protestantism had made great progress among the dominant merchant class and the Marian period saw no significant re-conversion to Catholicism, a conclusion demonstrable even in terms of will-preambles. While the local oligarchy contained few Marian zealots, it showed its usual impeccable loyalty to the State. Nevertheless, the reign of Mary was a time of social tension and personal indecision. Richard Wever, a Bristolian of somewhat unstable mind, had embraced Protestantism but began to attend the restored mass. He had received "muche consolatyone by the great and tedious travayle of one precher" but eventually, tortured by his conscience, committed suicide by jumping into the "infamous mylles of Bristolle", taking a young child with him.[4] Men of more normal personality were prepared to accept the dictates of the monarch. The Mayor and aldermen appear to have been more concerned about a revival of clerical power than about the suppression of Prayer Book worship. They refused to attend regularly at the Cathedral and were ordered by the Privy Council "to conforme themselves in frequenting the sermons, processions, and other publique ceremonyes" at the Cathedral. No longer were they to "absent themselfes as they have doone of late, nor loke from hensfourthe that the Dean and Chapitre shulde wayte uppon them or fetche them out of the cittie with their crosse and procession, being the same very unsemely and farre out of ordre"—the government had come down strongly on the side of clerical pretensions.[5]

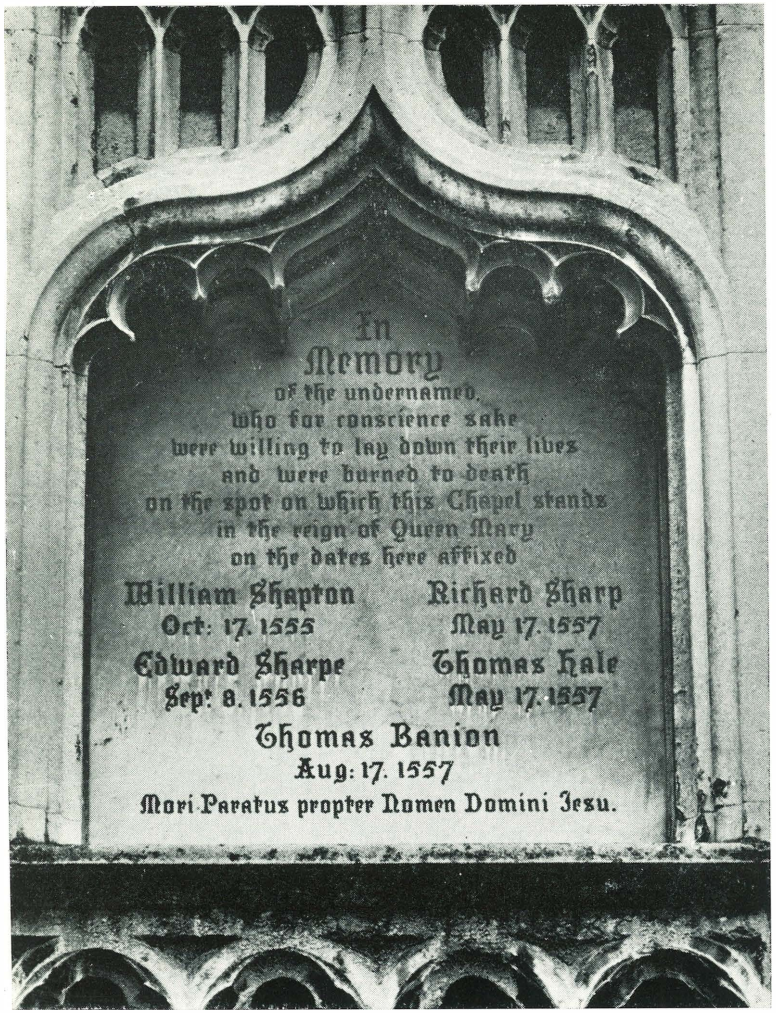
1. Edgeworth, *Sermons* . . . sig. Rr. iv.
2. *Acts of the Privy Council* ed. J. R. *Dasent* (London, 1890-1907), VI, p. 214 (11 December 1557).
3. *Ibid.* V, p.13.
4. *Narratives of the Reformation* ed. J. G. Nichols, Camden Society, lxxvii, 1859, p.31.
5. *Privy Council Acts,* VI, p.158.



Proceedings against Richard Sharpe as a relapsed heretic who affirmed that the Sacrament was an idol and that Christ's body and blood were not present in it.

Diocesan Records 1556 Cause Book, Bristol Archives Office

Photograph: Photo Prints (Bristol) Ltd.



Memorial to the martyrs on the wall of Highbury Chapel, Bristol. There is another memorial inside the chapel.

University of Bristol Arts Faculty

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The town's rulers were obliged to observe the injunction, although they still preferred to hear sermons at St. Mary Redcliffe. At Whitsuntide, 1557, the authorities spent 24/10d. on their Redcliffe sermons. The three preachers received 6/8d. each for their efforts and the residue paid for wine for their refreshment and for the services of church-wardens and bell-ringers.[1] After the accession of Elizabeth, the same citizens heard sermons from Mr. Northbrooke and others who opposed the moderation of their bishop, Richard Cheyney, and the "half-reformed" state of the Church of England. Only a handful of substantial men found the Marian regime so intolerable that they felt obliged to quit the realm.

Miss Garrett suggests that four Bristol merchants were among the "Marian exiles" who sought refuge in German Protestant cities —Griffith Jones, John Kelke, Charles Williams and Walter Williams. She gives few details of these men and suggests that some at least of them had motives other than religious for leaving England.[2] The aldermen and church-wardens of Bristol, whatever their private convictions, acted in concert with the government. The slender evidence for Puritanism in Elizabethan Bristol suggests that the influential sections of the community wanted a tolerant religion capable of healing social divisions. Marian Catholicism failed to meet this desire chiefly because of the determined opposition of a handful of men of modest social position holding a minority faith. Religious persecution was a most undesirable phenomenon with divisive effects. After the death of Mary, the majority of the citizens appear to have rejected demands for reprisals against the persecutors. A Bristol preacher, John Huntingdon, who had himself been an exile in Germany, condemned the spite and cruelty involved in the persecution: "You know who went to Redland, to buy green wood for the execution of those blessed saints that suffered, when near home, at the Back or Key, he might have had dry". (This assertion, incidentally, seems to be somewhat at variance with Foxe's account of the burning of William Saxton). Huntingdon was prepared to leave the guilty to the judgement of God, despite the fact that he and another man, Mr. Pacy, had themselves almost been caught and burned. Huntingdon had no doubt that the persecutors would not have taken pity on Pacy, a cripple, had he been caught—he would have burned, "stump and all".[3]

Historians of later eras and varying opinions have made of the Marian martyrs heroes and villains to suit their own purposes. John Foxe saw them as the heroic forebears of Elizabethan Pro-

1. Mayor's Audits, V, 1552-59, p.198.
2. C. H. Garrett, *The Marian Exiles* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 200-02, 334-35.
3. Seyer, *Memoirs of Bristol*, I, pp.234-35.

testantism, itself a sure proof of the futility of persecution. The same mentality motivated a Bristol chronicler who wrote with joy as late as 1625 that "God shewed mercie vnto his distressed Church of England in good time, contrary to men's expectation, in taking away of queene Mary."[1] By the early nineteenth century, the martyrdoms had become an historical event which could be viewed dispassionately: John Corry claimed that "the reign of Queen Mary was disgraced by the malignity of religious persecution".[2] Burning at the stake was "anti-Christian violence." While Anglo-Catholic historians sought to prove that the martyrs were dangerous sectarians, akin to foreign Anabaptists, who could not have been tolerated in England, Evangelicals sprang to their defence. The local writer Joseph Stratford viewed the victims of the perscution as the pioneers of Nonconformity in the area.[3] In truth, the martyrs were outside the mainstream of Protestant history. Lollardy was a form of proto-Puritanism which made a real contribution to the development of English Protestantism. It underwent a major revival under the stimulus of the restoration of Catholic ritual and priestly pretensions. But it was doomed to rapid decay with the re-imposition of Protestantism. The popular, anti-authoritarian religious zeal on which it was founded could find a suitable outlet only in the new Nonconformist sects of the seventeenth century. Not until the mid-nineteenth century did the Bristol martyrs have their memorial in the city. Highbury Chapel on St. Michael's Hill was dedicated to those who suffered under Mary (although the record of their names inscribed there was somewhat inaccurate):

"William Shapton Oct. 17th, 1555
Richard Sharp May 17th, 1557
Thomas Hale May 17th, 1557
Edward Sharpe Sept. 8th, 1556
Thomas Banion Aug. 17th, 1557".

The architect of the chapel was William Butterfield (who was closely related to those prominent dissenters, the Wills's).[4] Butterfield went on from this, his first commission, to become the High Church architect *par excellence*, the designer of Keble College and All Saints", Margaret Street, London. For the rest of his life, Butterfield regretted Highbury Chapel, the sole blemish in a career devoted to the re-creation of medieval Catholic splendours. No stranger artist could have been found to create a memorial to the Marian martyrs of Bristol.

1. Unpaginated MS. edition of "William Adams' Chronicle" in the Bristol Archives Office (dated 1625). Published in an abbreviated form as *Adam's Chronicle of Bristol* ed. F. F. Fox (Bristol, 1910).
2. J. Corry, *History of Bristol* (Bristol, 1816) I, p.228.
3. J. Stratford, *Good and Great Men of Gloucestershire* (Cirencester and London, 1869); see esp. p.101.
4. P. Thompson, *William Butterfield* (London, 1971) pp.19, 42.

APPENDIX :

Sources for the names of the Marian martyrs of Bristol.

	Foxe	Cause Books	18th cent. Cals.	N&T	Brice	Seyer
Wm. Saxton	x	x	—	x	—	—
R. Sharpe	x	x	—	x	—	x
E. Sharpe	x	—	—	x	—	x
Thomas Hale	x	—	—	x	—	x
Thos. Benion (Banion)	x	—	—	x	—	x
"A carpenter" (Anonymous)	x	—	—	—	—	—
Wm. Shapton (Shapman, etc.)	—	—	x	x	—	x
Rose Pencell	—	—	—	x	—	—
Other victims (Anonymous)	—	—	x(3)	—	x(2)	x(3)
Total :	6	2	4	7	2	8

(x indicates that the name is found in the source specified).

Sources :

Foxe. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* . . .(1st. edn., London, 1563).

Cause Books. Bristol Diocese Cause Books, Bristol Archives Office.

18th. cent. Cals. Bristol Archives Office, MSS. 22156 ("Annals of Bristol, 1067-1718") and 07831 ("Calendar History of Bristol, 1067-1724").

N&T. J. F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present* (Bristol, 1881).

Brice. T. Brice, *Briefe Register* . . .(2nd. edn., London, 1599).

Seyer. S. Seyer, *Memoirs of Bristol* (Bristol, 1821).

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The principal manuscript sources for the history of the Reformation in Bristol are contained in the collections of State papers in the Public Record Office, London, referred to here in their printed calendar form. The diocesan records prior to 1554 have disappeared; surviving records are deposited in the Bristol Archives Office. Among the other relevant manuscripts in the Office are the series of Mayor's Audits, various parochial records (including an important set of churchwardens' accounts), and the Great Orphan Book of Bristol. The diocesan records are fully described in a *Catalogue* edited by I. M. Kirby (1970); the other contents of the Archives Office in a *Guide* edited by Elizabeth Ralph (1971). Some references to Bristol occur in the records of the dioceses of Worcester and of Bath and Wells (in the Worcestershire Record Office, Worcester, and the Somerset Record Office, Taunton, respectively). The Bath and Wells registers are in print (Somerset Record Society). The various Bristol volumes of F. S. Hockaday's "Abstracts" (now in the Gloucester City Library) provide a large and convenient collection of materials from many sources.

There are important references to the religious divisions of Bristol in the following works: A. G. Chester, *Hugh Latimer* (Philadelphia, 1954); Hugh Latimer, *Works*, Vol. II, (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1845); E. G. Rupp, *Studies in the Making of the English Protestant Tradition* (Cambridge, 1947); G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police* (Cambridge, 1972).

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Latimer, Edgeworth, and other Tudor preachers are discussed by by J. W. Blench in *Preaching in England in the late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Oxford, 1964).

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