

**THE LOLLARDS OF THE
CHILTERN HILLS: GLIMPSES
OF ENGLISH DISSENT IN
THE MIDDLE AGES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649316953

The Lollards of the Chiltern hills: glimpses of English dissent in the middle ages by W. H. Summers

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

W. H. SUMMERS

**THE LOLLARDS OF THE
CHILTERN HILLS: GLIMPSES
OF ENGLISH DISSENT IN
THE MIDDLE AGES**

THE LOLLARDS OF THE CHILTERN HILLS

Glimpses of English Dissent in the Middle Ages

By

W. H. SUMMERS

Author of "Our Lollard Ancestors," "Memories of Jordans
and the Chalfonts," &c.

LONDON

FRANCIS GRIFFITHS

34 Maiden Lane, Strand, W.C.

1906

PREFACE

IN the following pages, an attempt has been made to illustrate from the records of a single county the course of a religious movement the influence of which upon the story of the English people has been much more deep and far-reaching than is usually supposed.

The writer was first led to take up the subject by the interest he felt in listening to curious local traditions of the Lollard times, still extant in the old abodes of the "Known Men" in Buckinghamshire, while he was for several years a resident in the district. In the year 1888, a series of articles from his pen, upon the "Lollards of Bucks," appeared in a local paper, the *South Bucks Free Press*. But he was then under the great disadvantage of being dependent for nearly all his facts upon the statements of that much discredited writer, John Foxe, and was not aware to what a remarkable extent Foxe's statements, with regard to Buckinghamshire at any rate, are confirmed and illustrated by independent authorities.

A very large number of writers have been consulted in the preparation of the work; and in most cases the names of these are given. But

as the work is intended for popular use, extracts from the Latin are given in an English translation, and old English is modernised where it is likely to present a difficulty. The references to books and documents, however, will enable those who wish to do so to consult the original text for themselves.

Some of the matter contained in the earlier chapters may at first sight seem somewhat irrelevant, as relating to North Bucks, where Lollardy never appears to have gained a footing; but it will be found that these passages often refer to institutions and localities to which allusion is made in the later chapters.

In conclusion, the writer desires to express his obligation to a number of gentlemen who have assisted him with valuable information and suggestions. Among these he may mention Mr. C. Guthrie, K.C., Procurator of the United Free Church of Scotland; the late Rev. P. W. Phipps, M.A., rector of Chalfont St. Giles; Mr. J. Cheese, of Amersham; and especially Dr. F. J. Furnivall, who has allowed him to make use of some "confessions of heresy," copied for the use of the Early English Text Society, though unfortunately not yet published in a complete form, owing to the scanty support accorded by the public to that excellent organisation.

The Lollards of the Chiltern Hills

CHAPTER I

SAINTLY LEGENDS

“ Now it is no small praise to Buckinghamshire, that being one of the lesser counties of England, it had more martyrs and confessors in it before the time of Luther than all the kingdom besides ”

So says Thomas Fuller (*Church History*, book v., chap. i.); and though his statement is perhaps not literally correct, it may fitly serve to introduce the story of the Buckinghamshire Lollards. Before entering on that story, however, it may be well to sketch the earlier conditions of religious life among which they arose.

Scarcely any traditions survive of the introduction of the faith of Christ into this part of England. Some have seen a memorial of Saxon, if not of Celtic, piety, in the crosses cut out in the turf of the Chiltern Hills at Whiteleaf and Bledlow, above the ancient British road of the Icknield Way. But these are probably of far

later origin; though the Puritan dislike to the sign of the cross makes it difficult to accept the suggestion of the late Mr. E. J. Payne that the Whiteleaf Cross was a landmark cut out by the Parliamentary soldiers.

The Rev. T. Williams, in an interesting article in the *Records of Buckinghamshire* for 1896, considers it likely that the earliest apostle of the county in Saxon days was Birinus, the founder of the see of Dorchester (Oxon), whose name survives in Berin's Hill, near Ipsden, five or six miles from the county boundary, where he is said to have had a cell, and perhaps in Bicester (Buringceastre). He died, says the legend, from the bite of an adder on the Chiltern Hills, upon December 3rd, 650. (Adders did not hibernate in those days, it would seem!)

The Chiltern country, then and for centuries after, was a vast forest of beeches and other trees, the haunt of the wolf, the boar, and the wild ox, and of robbers and outlaws yet more dreaded. The credit of making the forest passable for wayfarers is given to Leofstan, Abbot of St. Albans, in the days of Edward the Confessor. He opened up roads, and appointed men-at-arms to patrol the forest. It was the need of guarding this wild region that gave rise to the well-known office of "steward of the Chiltern Hundreds." But the wild and beautiful scenery which characterises South Bucks fostered good as well as evil elements of character. Alike in the days of the Lollards, in

the Reformation period, and in the days of the Civil War, the men of the Chiltern Hundreds, John Hampden's country, were foremost in the struggle against civil and ecclesiastical despotism, while those of the flatter district to the north of the hills were, as a rule, more disposed to yield to constituted authority.

When Birinus landed in 634, only fifty-four years had elapsed since the Saxons took Aylesbury. But it is quite uncertain whether any relics of British Christianity remained, and certainly heathenism was fully established in the district. Mr. Payne, in an article in Gibbs' *Buckinghamshire Miscellany*, thinks that Woden was worshipped at Waddesdon, Thor at Turville, Hilda at Hillesden, and Ægil, the sun-god, at Aylesbury. Mr. Williams, however, derives the name of the county town from the British *Eglucys*, a church, and thinks that one already stood there. Soon, at any rate, the county was so far Christianised as to have saints of its own. Prominent among these was that marvellous infant St. Rumbold or Romwald, a grandchild of Penda of Mercia, born at King's Sutton in Northamptonshire, but buried at Buckingham. The legend, quaintly and contemptuously told by Fuller in his *Worthies of England*, narrates how he cried three times, "I am a Christian," as soon as he was born; how he asked to be baptized, choosing his name and god-parents; how he pointed out a hollow stone to be used as the font, which none but his godfathers were able to lift; how he

spent three days in pious discourse, and then died, having ordered that his body should remain at Sutton one year, at Brackley two years, and at Buckingham ever after. The fame of the child-saint spread far and wide, and in the Middle Ages his shrine in Buckingham parish church was the resort of numerous pilgrims, for whose accommodation a large hostelry known as "Pilgrim's Inn," which was standing at the close of the eighteenth century, was erected. The town had a "St. Rumbold's Street," and a "Guild of St. Rumbold," incorporated by Henry VI.; and also several holy wells, the supposed efficacy of which in healing the blind and the lame was ascribed to the merits of the saint. There were also "Wells of St. Rumbold" at King's Sutton and Brackley, and a famous image of him at Bexley in Kent. This last, like the Holy Grail that Sir Lancelot might not see, was a test of chastity, for none but the pure in heart and life could lift it. The fact was, it is said, that it was fastened by a peg behind, which was only removed for those who had been liberal enough in their offerings.

Aylesbury, as well as Buckingham, had its saints in Saxon times. Eadburg and Eaditha, the daughters of Frithwald, a Mercian under-king, are said to have received Aylesbury as a gift from their father, and to have taken the veil in a convent there. St. Eadburg died at Aylesbury, but her body was afterwards removed to Edburton in Suffolk, where miracles were said to have been