

Challenging Times for Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester

by Andrew Payne



Fig 1 Stephen Gardiner (c.1483-1550), Bishop of Winchester by English School from Hardwick Hall © National Trust Images

Introduction

The 1530s were, arguably, the most turbulent of the whole Tudor period. Stephen Gardiner was bishop of Winchester from 1531. Here, by looking at his actions and writings during this period (and also in the 1550s), I hope to reveal something of the character of Winchester's last great Catholic bishop. To do this I have examined *The Letters and State Papers of the Reign of Henry VIII* [1], published in 28 volumes, the *Letters of Stephen Gardiner* [2], first published in 1933, and *Hall's Chronicle*, first published in 1548 [3]. I have also drawn on numerous secondary sources which are identified within the text.

Gardiner does not receive a good press. *The Dictionary of National Biography* [4] refers to his "reputation for double dealing which he bore throughout his career". Shakespeare, in his play *Henry VIII*, written some fifty years after Gardiner's death, has Henry VIII accusing Gardiner of flattery and of having, "a cruel nature, and a bloody ..." T. M. Parker in his authoritative work on the English reformation [5 p.17] calls him "timid, intriguing and

borné” (narrow-minded). Hutchinson [6. p.225] calls him “*devious, scheming and odious*”. Was he really that bad?

Gardiner was consecrated Bishop of Winchester in 1531. When Anne Boleyn was crowned Queen of England in 1533, Gardiner escorted her into Westminster Hall. In 1534 he wrote an influential work that asserted that the Pope had no jurisdiction over Henry VIII. In 1535 his erstwhile friend Sir Thomas More was executed for treason. The next year Anne Boleyn was executed. In 1538 the shrine to St. Swithun, within Winchester cathedral was destroyed. In 1540 three protestants were burned at the stake for “*Preaching against the Doctryne of Stephen Gardiner*” [3 p. 840]. So, what kind of man was he?

Church Reform

The call to reform the English Church became loud and clear after Martin Luther had nailed his “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of a church in Wittenberg in 1517. The whole system of indulgences, pardons, etc. was open to corruption. The religious courts which impinged on people’s lives far more than the secular courts, were seen as arbitrary, venal and pervasive. Demands were made for liturgical reform, a Bible in English, overhaul of the clergy, and even closure of the many wealthy religious houses which often exploited their tenants. However, I will show that neither Henry VIII nor Stephen Gardiner had any interest in real reform; Henry wanted his divorce from Katherine of Aragon and all the wealth he could seize from the Church, and Gardiner just conformed.

The Process of Reform in England to 1538

In 1515 Thomas Wolsey was made a Cardinal. As Henry VIII’s Chancellor, he saw an early opportunity to seize some of the Church’s wealth for his own ends, claiming that in certain small monasteries “*neither was God served, nor religion kept*” [6 p.19] and some 29 religious houses were closed down and their wealth used to found a new secular college at Oxford, to be named Cardinal’s College and a new college at Ipswich, Wolsey’s birthplace. This was done with the able assistance of Thomas Cromwell. Long before the “suppression of the monasteries” their suppression had begun.

From 1526 Henry became infatuated with Anne Boleyn. From 1529 she accompanied Henry wherever he went, almost as though she were Queen. Gardiner, on behalf of Wolsey, had been an energetic and effective ambassador in the divorce matters but, when he realised that if Wolsey failed to obtain the Pope’s sanction for a divorce Wolsey would be in deep trouble, he set out to ingratiate himself with both Henry and Anne Boleyn [2 p.xxvi]. In 1529 Wolsey was dismissed and replaced by Sir Thomas More as Chancellor and in November 1531 Gardiner was appointed to replace Wolsey at Winchester. Later Gardiner was to complain to Cromwell that he received £1300 a year less than Bishop Foxe had done. [2 Letter 37 June 1532] Gardiner also continued as Henry’s principal secretary.

Burning for heresy had been very rare, right back to the time of Henry IV’s Act *De Haeretico Comburendo*, of 1401, but now the burnings began in earnest. Thomas Hitton (“the first Protestant martyr”), a friend of William Tyndale, was burned at the stake in 1530. The saintly More called him “*the Devil’s stinking martyr*” [7] and between 1531 and 1533 six Protestants were burned at the stake, Gardiner’s conservatism matching More’s zeal. Thomas More regarded these burnings as “*lawful, necessary and well done*” [8 p.299]. However, while orthodoxy prevailed in general, things were going far from well in Henry’s pursuit of a divorce from Katherine. In 1531 the clergy were required to take an oath acknowledging Henry as “Supreme Head” of the Church in England. As a layperson, More did not need to take the oath. The clergy, including Gardiner, after considerable

resistance, eventually took the oath in 1532 after Convocation had added the clause "as far as the law of Christ allows" (translated from the Latin). [1 April 1532] More remained in office.

In January 1532 Cromwell brought a petition before Parliament complaining about the iniquities of the church courts and demanding no further canon law be passed without the King's assent. The authority of the courts, and ultimately the Pope's, were brought into question. Gardiner spoke against these proposals, much to the King's displeasure. Despite this, Convocation had "*summoned Hugh Latimer (Bishop of Worcester) who refused to sign the ... articles, and was pronounced contumacious and committed to prison at Lambeth. On consenting to subscribe . . . his sentence was taken off. . . . On 10th April he subscribed before Edward Archbishop of York, Stephen Bishop of Winchester, John Bishop of Rochester . . .*" [1 March 1532] Despite this, Gardiner, who seems to have been a very argumentative man, wrote to Henry VIII, regretting his own fall from grace, hoping the King would forgive "*what I have doon, what I shulde have doon and what I maye doo . . .*", but then proceeds to point out that all his arguments have been based on "*a gret number of learned men affirming [his arguments] ... to be true*", including "*your Highness booke against Luther, . . . the Counsaile of Constance*" and so on, and asks Henry to prove otherwise as he, Gardiner, is not so "*lernerd in divinite*" as the King! [2 Letter 36 May 1532]

The following day, 16th May, after considerable pressure from the King, the Church capitulated and signed the formal document known as the *Submission of the Clergy*. From that time on only the King and Parliament could make new laws. Gardiner remained in two minds and was praised by a Scottish theologian, Volusenus, for his opposition to these measures. [4] The imperial ambassador Chapuys wrote to Charles V (the Holy Roman Emperor, and Katherine of Aragon's nephew), "*Churchmen will be of less account than shoemakers, who have the power of assembling and making their own statutes. The King also wishes bishops not to have power to lay hands on persons accused of heresy ... The Chancellor and the Bishops oppose him. He is very angry, especially with the Chancellor and the bishop of Winchester ...*" [1 15 May 1532]. This is the same date as Gardiner's letter to Henry.

However, when More resigned as Chancellor just a few weeks later because of this *Submission*, Gardiner dutifully watched the proceedings. He was beginning to bend.

Meanwhile, Henry's divorce suit was becoming more urgent. In September, Pope Clement wrote that he believed that Gardiner had completely changed his mind on the divorce but this was certainly not the impression Gardiner gave to Henry because, on the 1st of September, he attended the glittering ceremony by which Anne Boleyn was created Marquess of Pembroke. "*Before Mass, wearing a gown of crimson velvet 'completely covered with the most costly jewels', and with her hair loose about her shoulders*" [8 p. 326] she was escorted into the presence chamber where the formal declaration was read out by Gardiner. Two days later he accompanied Henry to Calais, and thereafter he was sent on further embassies into France on the matter of the divorce. The Pope was getting different messages because on 4th September Dr. May, a kinsman of Gardiner, writing to a colleague, said that "*the Pope told Mai that Gardiner ... has changed his mind about the divorce and left the Court on that account*". [1 4 Sept 1532] Others were equally confused. In October Thomas Wynter, the Archdeacon of York, and the bastard son of Thomas Wolsey, wrote to a friend, "*Although I receive letters and hear reports that the king is not so well inclined to the bp. of Winchester yet somehow we are always slow in believing what we cannot hear without sorrow. Unhappy me! That a bishop of so much virtue, faith, probity and humanity should fall into trouble of this kind*" [1 20 October 1532]. Perhaps Gardiner's business in France allowed him to avoid the King's displeasure.

In January 1533 Henry secretly married Anne Boleyn and she fell pregnant. Cranmer, a Cambridge don and sometime ambassador to Charles V, and a zealous reformer, was suddenly elevated to the archbishopric of Canterbury and six weeks later, on 23rd May he declared Katharine of Aragon's marriage to Henry null and void, from its very beginning, and Anne was crowned Queen of England on 1st June. "*all proceeded to Westminster Hall, and received the Queen, who, supported by [the bishop of] London and [the bishop of] Winchester, came to Westminster church, preceded by my lord of Suffolk with the crown*" This is Cranmer's account of 1 June 1533. [9 p.500] More did not attend, nor John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, who supported Katherine. He had been arrested shortly beforehand.

In September Gardiner travelled into France once again on divorce business but by early 1534 he seems to have come under suspicion by Henry; he resigned his post as secretary and retired to his diocese. At this time More was accused of treason by Thomas Cromwell but was cleared by the Privy Council. However, he steadfastly refused to take the oath of supremacy and refused to uphold publicly Henry's annulment from Katherine.

In April a new Act of Succession was passed by which Princess Mary was declared illegitimate and Princess Elizabeth became heir to the throne. Gardiner pointedly wrote to Cromwell to say how busily he was occupied in Winchester administering the "*taking (of) othes according to the Acte ...*" [2 Letter 42 May 1534]

In July 1534 Gardiner wrote a submissive letter to Cromwell asking how he could restore himself to the King's favour. Henry was to visit Guildford, within Gardiner's diocese. Should Gardiner come to Guildford to meet the King? This "*might percase not be wel taken, considering the (King's) journey is appointed for recreation.*" Or perhaps the King would "*take his pastyme in my poore house at Farenham*" Gardiner apologises for bothering Cromwell in such a little matter but adds that "*My small matier ... is the grettest matier I have.*" [2 Letter 45 July 1534] A year later, as we shall see, Gardiner had come round to the King's position.

1535 was a bad year. In the previous November, the Act of Supremacy confirmed Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church in England. The Treasons Act swiftly followed by which any opposition to this principal would be treason. In January Cromwell was appointed Henry's Vicar-General. What an affront this must have been to all clergy! This layman, this son of a blacksmith, appointed above all the churchmen in the land. Anyone who refused to accept Henry as the Supreme Head of the Church could be executed. Several monks and priests including one Richard Reynolds of the Bridgettine house of Syon, and a renowned scholar, were hanged drawn and quartered sending shock waves across Europe [10 p.163]. Reynolds, incidentally, had been heard to relay the story that "*our sovereign had a ... (company) of maidens over one of his chambers at Farnham castle while he was with ... the lord (Bishop) of Winchester.*" [6 p. 72]

By mid-1535 Gardiner was busying himself in the instruction of all the clergy and others in his diocese in the true meaning of royal supremacy and sent to Cromwell copies of these instructions. "*As touching children, I have delivered thiese verses, herin inclosed, to be lerned. To the scolers of Winchestre, to other pety teachers I gave commaundment in general ... [and also] I preache the matier upon Sondag next in every mannes mouth ... I was never buysied, what with the matiers itself, and what with care lest I do not well..*" [2 Letter 49 June 1535]

He might well have busied himself with pleasing the King because Bishop Fisher's refusal to take the oath of supremacy had lead to his arrest in April and he was executed on 22 June. More was tried for high treason on 1 July and executed five days later. No wonder Gardiner might appear a little "timid"! (as suggested in my Introduction)

At the end of September, Gardiner sent to Cromwell [2 Letter 51 September 1535] a draft document which argued that a Papal brief of 26 July 1535 which denounced Henry for the execution of Fisher had no authority and shortly after this he published his *De Vera Obedientia* which asserted that the Pontiff had no jurisdiction over other churches and that rulers should be supreme over their own churches. [4] This work would become influential across Europe and was reprinted in Strasbourg; it became a driving force for church reform. Gardiner now busied himself with other reforming matters, working on an English translation of the New Testament initiated by Cranmer.

Cromwell now began sending out commissioners on “visitations” to examine the state of all religious houses. This resulted in the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, a valuation of all church lands, and would culminate in the suppression of the monasteries, from 1536. But, well before this policy was announced, seizures and closures got underway. This is an extract from a letter written in September by Chapuys to Charles V:

“The king having arrived at Winchester ... caused an inventory to be made of the treasures of the church, from which he took certain fine rich unicorns’ horns and a large silver cross adorned with jewels. He has also taken from the bishop certain mills, to give them to the community to earn favour. Cromwell, wherever the king goes, goes round about visiting the abbeys making inventories of their goods and revenues turning out the monks and nuns It is true they are not expressly told to go out, but it is clear that they had better do it which is the object of the king in order to seize the property ...” [1 25 Sept 1535]

Just four days later, the King directed that half the profits of the bishopric of Worcester be made over to the crown. [1 29 Sept 1535] He was getting the idea fast.

Gardiner, himself, was involved in these visitations but was no match for Cromwell. One of Cromwell’s commissioners writes thus to Cromwell:

“Whereas the king sent my lord of Winchester ... to see the order of Chertsey Abbey, and they reported all was well, you will know somewhat more by the compertes which I send.” [1 29 Sept 1535]

There follows his compertes: *“The abbot has alienated some things: ‘Incontinentes’ seven with women; ‘incontinentes et sodomitae’ four with women, boys, and by voluntary pollutions”* Was this fabrication?

At the end of September Gardiner was sent on an embassy to France in an effort to get the French king to support him against the Pope. Clearly, he was a very effective ambassador and spent much of the next two or three years travelling in Europe in this capacity. Interestingly, in early 1536 Henry VIII considered the idea of forming a protestant league with Germany – a European union – but Gardiner strongly argued against the idea. *“If this be graunted unto, thenne shal the Kynges Highnes be bounde to the Church of Germanye, and without ther consent, maye not doo [what he believes is right] Wherfor a leage or bonde herin in such termes is, in my jugement, incompatible;”* [2 Letter 53 February 1536]

During his time away the suppression of the monasteries really got underway. Cromwell’s report on the state of the religious houses ensured this would happen and as Henry and his supporters began to enjoy their new found wealth, “reform” in this direction was vigorously pursued. What Gardiner really felt about these “reforms” is not known.

On 14th May 1536 Cromwell wrote to Gardiner with startling news:

“the Queen’s incontinent living [being] so rank and common that the ladies of her privy chamber could not conceal it. Certain persons were examined, and the matter appeared so evident that besides that crime, there brake out a certain conspiracy of the

King's death, which extended so far that all we that had the examination of it quaked at the danger his Grace was in, and on our knees gave (God) laud and praise that he had preserved him so long from it Marks and Norris and the Queen's brother were committed to the Tower, then she herself was apprehended and committed to the same place; Norris, Weston, Brereton and Marks (had been) condemned to death, having been arraigned at Westminster on Friday last. The Queen and her brother [would] be arraigned tomorrow, and [would] go the same way Gardiner [would] receive 200 (pounds) of the 300 (pounds) that were out amongst these men, notwithstanding great suit hath been made for the whole; which though the King's highness might give in this case, yet his Majesty doth not forget your service; From the Rolls in haste, 14 May." [1 May 1536] This sounds very much like a reward, but for what?

Anne Boleyn was executed on 19th May. Gardiner, despite having argued across Europe for Henry's divorce from Katherine, despite having declared her Marquess of Pembroke, and despite having supported her at her coronation, would have rejoiced at her downfall. Her family had been reformers. Cranmer had been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury through the Boleyn family's influence, thus denying Gardiner that coveted office.

Henry no longer trusted Gardiner. In early 1538 Cromwell wrote a warning letter to Gardiner to "*assure him that the King bears him no displeasure, although his Highness's letters sent herewith make perhaps a longer rehearsal of matters than Gardiner would have thought necessary of matters in which he had been remiss. It is only to show him that the King keeps in memory the whole train of his affairs and expects Gardiner to do the like.*" [1 15 Feb, 1538] Shortly after this he was recalled to England. On 16th April Gardiner handed over to Henry, from his bishopric, "*the manor of Assher (Esher)*" with all its lands in "*Assher, Dytton, Cobham, Kyngeston and Walton*". A successful raid by Henry [1 16 April 1538]. But things remained difficult between Gardiner, Cromwell and the King. Cromwell reminded Gardiner of this by saying that he forbore "*repetition of the contentious matter that has lately passed between them. Whatever Gardiner has thought of Cromwell he has been his friend and has written nothing to him that the King has not read before it was sent...*" [1 24 April 1538] In May John Forest, a friar and the former confessor to Queen Katherine, was burned at Smithfield for persisting in declaring that the Pope was the supreme head of the Holy Catholic Church. [3 p. 825/6] This was a timely reminder to Gardiner.

Gardiner was back in France throughout May. At this time Cromwell's men were busy making inventories of the several friars' houses in Winchester. On 21 July the Carmelites, the Dominicans, the Franciscans and Austin friars all surrendered their properties to Cromwell. Their roofs would later yield up their valuable lead. Gardiner's embassy had again earned the ire of Henry VIII and he was replaced in August by Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London. He had to suffer the indignity of leaving all his plate and other personal possessions for the new ambassador and was merely promised compensation by the King. Before he left he engaged in a great and unseemly altercation with Bonner, who reported the whole affair to Cromwell. [1 August 1538]

On Saturday 21st September 1538 Thomas Wriothesely, a former pupil of Gardiner, in company with Richard Pollard and John Williams, sitting in Winchester Cathedral, wrote a letter to Thomas Cromwell:

"About three o'clock this morning, made an end of the shrine here in Winchester. There was no gold, nor ring, nor true stone ... but all great counterfeits; but all the silver alone will amount to 2000 mks. Have also received the cross of emeralds, the cross called Jerusalem, another gold cross, two gold chalices and other plate. The prior and chapter were conformable. The mayor with eight or nine of his bretheren, the bishop's chancellor ... assisted and praised the king therefor. The altar will be worth taking down

but it is such a piece of work that they cannot finish before Monday night or Tuesday morning ...”

And off they went to Hyde Abbey and St Mary's to “*sweep away all the rotten bones that be called relics ... lest it should be thought we came more for the treasure than for avoiding the abomination of idolatry.*” [1 21 Sept. 1538]

A separate inventory of the cathedral's treasures was also prepared. Within the church they found plate of gold garnished with stones, a frontal of “*broidering work and pearls*”, a great cross and an image of “*plate of gold garnished with precious stones*”, a great cross and images of Christ, Mary and John, of silver and partly gilt, a silver cross “over the iron door”. In the sacristy: 5 gold crosses garnished with precious stones, a “*scryne*” (chest) of gold plate similarly garnished, a small pair of gold candlesticks, two gold boxes, three gold chalices, a gold sacring bell, four gold rings with precious stones, a breast plate, two saints' arms of gold plate and St Philip's foot covered with gold plate. What more could they want? Wriothesely had struck gold!

Wriothesely met Gardiner, who had just arrived back from France, the following Friday. However, in his report to Cromwell about this meeting, Wriothesely wrote that Gardiner “*did not seem to dislike the doing at Canterbury* (Thomas a Becket's shrine there had been destroyed by Richard Pollard in early September) *and wished the like had been done at Winchester.*” [1 September 1538] This implies that Wriothesely had not yet told Gardiner of the destruction at Winchester. Pollard, incidentally, had despatched to Cromwell 20 oxen carts of treasure from Canterbury! [6 p.183]

The English Reformation to this point had brought about Henry's Supremacy over the Church, the suppression of the monasteries and the seizure of their great wealth. The kind of reform demanded by the Protestants, had hardly progressed at all. The primacy of the priesthood as intermediary between man and God, the importance of the Latin Mass, the belief in transubstantiation, and so on, all remained in place. Changes to the liturgy had been minimal. Anyone advocating otherwise was a heretic and could be burned at the stake. Gardiner had supported, nay, advocated, Henry's Supremacy and the seizure of the monasteries but remained as committed as ever to the remainder of Catholic doctrine. Indeed, such was Henry's belief in transubstantiation that he prevailed upon Cromwell and Cranmer (two reformers!) to set up a show trial at which he, Henry, would be the principal proponent for transubstantiation and would expose the appalling heresies of the opposite view. Gardiner found the victim, one John Lambert, alias Nicolson, a former close associate of Gardiner in his Cambridge days [6 p.179].

“This day, in the King's hall ... certain scaffolds, bars and seats were erected ... and at the highest end a “hautt place” for the King. This hall was richly hung, and about noon, his Majesty being seated, with the most part of the lords temporal and spiritual, bishops, judges, doctors, serjeants at law, the mayor and aldermen of London and others, John Nycolson, clk., alias Lambert, ... was brought before his Grace and certain articles concerning the Sacrament of the Altar objected to him. He held to his opinions, denying the very body of God to be in the said Sacrament in corporal substance, but only to be there spiritually. The King's Majesty reasoned with him in person, sundry times confounding him, so that he alone would have been sufficient to confute a thousand such. It was not a little rejoicing ... [to see and hear] how his Grace handled the matter, for it shall be a precedent while the world stands, and no one shall be so bold ... to attempt the like cause. After the King had confounded him in Scripture, so that Lambert had nothing to say for himself, the bishops and doctors exhorted him to abandon his opinions, as his Grace did also; but he refused, and will have his deserts (sic). The matter lasted from noon till 5, when he was conveyed to the Marshalsea. London 16 Nov.” [1 16 November 1538]

Later in the day Sir Thomas Elyot, some time English ambassador to Charles V, wrote to Henry VIII to express his *“admiration of a divine influence or spark of divinity which late appeared to all of them that beheld your Grace sitting in the throne ... as Supreme Head of the Church of England next under Christ, about the decision and condemnation of the pernicious errors of the most detestable heretic John Nicolson, called also Lambert, when all men admired the fulmination of the most vehement arguments by the King in confutation of his heresies and also his wonderful patience in the long sustaining of the foolish and tedious objections of the said Lambert”* Sir Thomas noted how *“the people wept for joy and comfort at seeing this.”* [1 16 November 1538]

Lambert was burned at Smithfield six days later. Gardiner would have rejoiced; what Cromwell and Cranmer thought is not known. Much later, in 1550, Gardiner railed against Cranmer for now holding these heretical views for which Lambert was burned. He called Cranmer a hypocrite, denounced him for his malice, pointed out that Cranmer had *“vehemently reasoned against Lamberd (sic)”* and that he had remained silent when he, Gardiner, had preached the truth of transubstantiation before the King. [2 Letter 151, The Tower, 1550] This was written with great passion from Gardiner’s prison cell.

On 16th November, the very same day as Lambert’s show trial, Henry VIII issued an edict against heretical books, documents and practices. In this edict it was proclaimed that Thomas à Becket should no longer be esteemed a saint, that all images of him should be destroyed and all festivals in his name be abolished. [1 Nov. 1538] This was the last straw for the Pope and Henry was excommunicated on 17th December.

Stephen Gardiner Shows his Colours

During the last eight or nine years of Henry’s reign two factions at court fought for the heart of the nation. The conservatives led by Gardiner and the Duke of Norfolk; the reformists led by Cranmer and, initially, Cromwell. Henry, a natural conservative, passed the Act of Six Articles in 1539. This allowed no deviation of belief. The denial of any of the six articles would amount to heresy. The articles included: belief in transubstantiation, priests should be unmarried and celibate (Cranmer had to send his wife/mistress back to the Continent), and the rightfulness of private Masses.

After the fall of Cromwell in 1540 the conservatives were in the ascendant and the burnings became more frequent. Contemporaries reported that Gardiner plotted against Cranmer but Henry let the plot run its course before rejecting Gardiner’s proceedings and allowing Cranmer to return to favour. Perhaps he only wanted to frighten Cranmer out of his reformist tendencies. Characteristically, Gardiner, much later, wrote an indignant letter to Cranmer denying that he had ever sought Cranmer’s downfall [2 Letter 125 July 1547]

Between 1538 and 1546 numerous persons were burned at the stake for their protestant beliefs. Here is, almost certainly, an eye-witness account of one such group:

“The thirtie daie of July [1540] were drawen on herdelles out of the Tower to Smithfield, Robert Barnes ... Thomas Garard and Wylliam Jerome ... Powell, Fetherston and Abel. The firste three were drawen to the stake ... and were burned: the latter three were drawen to the Galowes ... and were hanged, hedded and quartered. Here ye must note that the first three wer menne that professed the Gospell of Jesu Christ and were preachers thereof. But wherefore they were now thus cruelly executed. I knowe not, although I have searched to knowe the truth ... And as I saied before, this much I finde in their attainer, that they were detestable and abominable Heretickes, and that they taught many heresies ... And in deede at their burning they asked the Shirifes wherefore thei were condemned, who answered they could not tell: but if I maie saie the truth, most menne

said it was for Preaching against the Doctryne of Stephen Gardiner ... who chiefly procured their death ... The last three ... wer put to death for Treason ... [for denying] the kynges supremacie and affirming his Mariage with the lady Katherine was good.” [3 p. 840]

Edward Hall, the author and compiler of *Hall's Chronicle*, was, himself, Undersheriff of London from 1535 until his death in 1547. He also records how a child of 15 years, one Richard Mekins, was burned at Smithfield in 1540 because, “*as he had heard some other folks talke, chanced to speake against the Sacrament of the aultar*” and was overheard, he was “*accused to Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London ... But ... many spake and saied that it was a great shame for the Bishop who ... ought rather to have laboured to have saved his life, than to procure that terrible execution.*”

In 1543, in a book entitled *George Joye Confuteth Winchester's False Articles*, Gardiner was accused of having singled out and persecuted Robert Barnes (above). This accusation clearly stung Gardiner because in 1545 he wrote a ten paged open letter to George Joye refuting the accusation, telling him of his acquaintance and friendship with his “*scoler*” Barnes over fifteen years, of his frustration at Barnes’s “*rayling at bysshops*”, of his concern for and subsequent disillusionment with Barnes over this time. Gardiner was frequently argumentative in his letters, this letter is no exception giving details of texts quoted and sermons given over the period and especially during Lent in 1540 when Barnes had preached against Gardiner at St Paul’s Cross. This letter which has been described as “*the longest single piece of autobiographical writing by Gardiner and the most interesting*” [2 p.149] is filled with a genuine sense of grievance at such an unjust accusation. Tellingly, the dreadful deaths of the six “*heretics*” and “*traitors*”, are of no account whatsoever; Gardiner’s concern is “*howe things be blowed and blustred abroad with lyes and [that] Barnes death is layde to my charge “... when ... “I was not in the Privye Counsayle” at the time.* [2 Letter 81 November 1545]

Epilogue - A Cruel Nature and a Bloody

Shortly before his death in 1547 Henry, in his will, set out how England should be governed during Edward’s minority. He established a 16 man Council, and Gardiner was excluded. Gardiner was too divisive a figure and an intransigent one. In the event Edward Seymour (one of Jane Seymour’s brothers) staged a coup by which the Council named him Protector. During the six years of Edward’s reign Protectors came and went but the Council remained profoundly protestant. Gardiner rejected their reforms which included the abolition of the Act of Six Articles and spent most of these years in prison occasionally writing lengthy and indignant letters setting out why and how these Protestants were wrong. This time he stuck to his principles. Perhaps the Protector’s wrath was less terrible than Henry’s.

In July 1553 when Mary seized power Gardiner was released and immediately made Chancellor. Gardiner officiated at Mary’s coronation at Westminster Abbey on 30th September [10 p.236-239]. He had to, as archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Ridley of London had already been arrested along with Hugh Latimer, chaplain to Edward VI.

Mary’s proposal to marry Phillip of Spain was widely unpopular and even Gardiner advised her against it. Wyatt’s rebellion in early 1554 was supported by many who opposed the marriage. The rebellion failed and Elizabeth, Mary’s sister, was implicated and taken to the Tower where she feared execution. Gardiner urged Mary to keep Elizabeth there, possibly even to have her executed, [11 p.91] but, after writing an impassioned plea to her sister, Elizabeth was eventually sent under house arrest to Woodstock. Just three days into the rebellion Gardiner searched some lodgings in the Minories and arrested one John

Harington and found there a copy of Elizabeth's letter to Mary which copy was being sent to France by the French ambassador. Since the French were believed to be implicated in Wyatt's revolt which was still being suppressed [2 Letter 158 January 1554] further suspicion was cast on Elizabeth. How did they get their copy?

On 25th July 1554 Gardiner officiated at the marriage ceremony of Mary and Phillip here in Winchester Cathedral, well away from any possible rebellion. On their return to London there were sumptuous pageants in the city. One image showed Henry VIII holding a book on which was written "*Verbum Dei*". This caused great trouble because it seemed to imply approval of Henry's religious policies. Gardiner berated the artist responsible "*with vile words calling him a traitor.*" [10 p.245]

From 1553 until his death in November 1555 Gardiner played a leading part in bringing the English Church back to Rome and he restored the authority of the Ecclesiastical courts. In December 1554 he procured the re-enactment of *De Haeretico Comburendo* by which heretics could be burned. The act had been abolished during Edward VI's reign. He, personally, presided at the heresy trial of a number of clergy (Bishop John Hooper, John Bradford and John Rogers) in January 1555 and they were burned at the stake [2 p.xxxiv] .

From 1554, Protestants, including many ordinary people, had been seized and imprisoned. After the re-introduction of *De Haeretico Comburendo* ecclesiastical tribunals were set up and Edmund Bonner, Bishop of London, in particular, began stamping out religious dissent. He became known as "*Bloody Bonner*". What the *Dictionary of National Biography* [4] euphemistically calls "*the severities of her [Mary's] reign*" had been initiated by Gardiner. The number of those burned may be debatable but the scale is not. He certainly believed in this form of punishment. Back in 1546 one Agnes Askewe had been burned for heresy. John Bale published two books claiming she was a martyr. These books incensed Gardiner who wrote at great length to Protector Somerset arguing that she had quite rightly been condemned "*by the lawes worthy [and suffered] the paines of death.*" [2 Letter 120 May 1547]



Gardiner's Chapel



Gardiner's Coat of Arms on top of the chapel

Gardiner died on 12th November 1555. He was buried temporarily in Southwark ten days later. The following February he was removed to Winchester in great estate and, on Friday 28th February his body was "*brought up on the left hand the high aulter and there set*

above the grownd, between two walles, made of brycke, a yerd of height ... Then, after De profundis was said, [he] was layed over a borde, covered with a ryche pall, so that there was no grownde broke for hym ... tyll soche tyme as a chapell sholde be made for hym ... [and thereafter] every man avoyded the cherche and went to Wolvsey to dynner, where there was grete chere." [12]

Judging Stephen Gardiner

Gardiner had few admirers. He was a man of many contradictions; an arch-conservative Catholic who wrote the influential and reformist, *De Vera Obedientia*. He was learned, argumentative, and pedantic. His ability to recall past slights and to re-argue disputes of a previous decade suggests a deeply self righteous man of more learning than wisdom. There is nothing warm about Gardiner. According to Holinshed [13] Catherine Willoughby, the Duchess of Suffolk (one of Katherine Parr's ladies-in-waiting) dressed her dog like a bishop and called him Gardiner. In 1551 when the Privy Council deprived him of his bishopric they reported that at his hearing he "showed ... a wilful pride ...[and] ... a cankered heart." [14 16 Feb 1551]. Later they referred to his "lewd behaviour and disobedience in excusing his disobedience" and complained that he "railed against his judges, sought to defame the whole estate of the realm and ... showed himself ... utterly given to disquiet." [14 Feb 22 1551] With Gardiner in prison Catherine Willoughby is reported to have declared that "It was merry with the lambs when the wolf was shut up". [15] In Mary Tudor's reign she fled England.

Clearly Henry VIII found Gardiner a very able man but not entirely trustworthy. In his time Gardiner strove for the annulment of Katherine of Aragon's marriage, served at Anne Boleyn's coronation and took comfort in her fall. He was accused of conspiring with the Duke of Norfolk on behalf of Catherine Howard and later against Queen Katherine Parr, at whose marriage to Henry VIII he had officiated. In Henry's reign he conspired against Cranmer and had him arrested in Mary's. He encouraged Mary Tudor to hold Princess Elizabeth in the Tower if not to have her executed.

His views on heresy were not unusual for the times and if people approved of burning heretics then they would approve of his actions as Chancellor during Mary's reign, and indeed, during Henry's reign too.

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