

The Burton ‘Heretic’

BURTON-ON-TRENT is an English town with a dark claim to fame. This is the birthplace of the last man in England to be burned at the stake, who died in 1612.

In the Seventeenth Century, the Church had a strong hold over ordinary people’s lives. They feared its teaching about eternal punishment, and the king could easily arrest you and imprison you for disagreeing with it. If you didn’t believe what the Church taught, you were in big trouble.

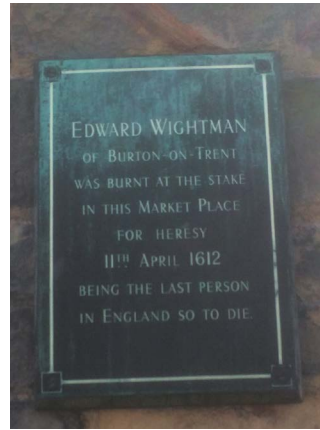
Edward Wightman was a man who wanted to believe what was right. It is likely that he had access to a copy of the English Bible which was newly circulating. We learn most about him from the Royal Writ from King James I sent to the Bishop of Lichfield in 1612 ordering Wightman’s arrest and execution.

Real Beliefs

The writ tells us that Wightman believed:

- ◆ That there is no Trinity of Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in the unity of God
- ◆ That Jesus Christ is not God
- ◆ That the Holy Ghost is not God co-equal with the Father and the Son
- ◆ That the soul is mortal
- ◆ That the soul does not go to heaven when a person dies

- ◆ That baptism is to be administered only to converts of sufficient age and understanding
- ◆ That Christianity was not wholly professed and preached in the Church.



To Edward Wightman, it mattered what you believed. It wasn’t enough to agree with the priest; everyone had a duty to find the Bible truth out for themselves, and then to stand up for it. Such an attitude is still quite rare today.

The Christadelphians, who produce *Glad Tidings*, base their beliefs on the Bible and no other authority. In fact, we agree with Wightman that the things he believed are what the Bible teaches.

He was burnt at the stake in Lichfield Market Place on 11th April 1612, where a plaque still commemorates his status as ‘the last person in England so to die’. History has labelled him a heretic, but perhaps he should be remembered because he read the Bible for himself.

Paul Tovell