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The History of the White Horse Inn

A blue plaque on the wall of Chetwynd Court in King's College Cambridge commemorates the fact that on that site once stood the White Horse Inn.

That Inn played a very important part in the history of the Reformation in this country, and yet I expect that the vast majority of visitor's to the College never notice the plaque, or if they do, they are not aware of its historical value. An account of the activates and the importance of that Inn can be found on the Modern Reformation web site, under the White Horse Inn section, I have copied it here for your information.

"In 1520, just a few years after Martin Luther nailed his protest to the church door in Wittenburg, a small band of English scholars began to meet regularly to discuss the German Reformer's writings, along with Erasmus' recently completed Greek New Testament. The meeting house was a tavern in Cambridge England on the campus of King's College called the White Horse Inn, and the names of those who regularly met there include Robert Barnes, William

Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, Nicholas Ridley, Hugh Latimer, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Bilney and others.

These meetings were not simply informal discussions over ale, for the White Horse Inn, by its frequent and regular open discussions on the key issues of Protestant theology, soon became the kindling fire for the larger English Reformation as a whole. The discussions were primarily led by Robert Barnes and Thomas Bilney, and because of the frequent citations of the work of Martin Luther, many referred to this Cambridge meeting house as "Little Germany."

The man responsible for bringing most of the men to the White Horse Inn discussions was Thomas Bilney, who was himself awakened to the gospel message after working through Erasmus' Greek New Testament. Specifically, Bilney was greatly moved by reading Paul's words to Timothy: *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief"* (1Timothy 1:15). D'Aubigne writes that Bilney quickly came to see that it is Jesus Christ who saves, and not the church. *'I see it all,' said Bilney; 'my vigils, my fasts, my pilgrimages, my purchase of masses and indulgences were destroying instead of saving me. All these efforts were, as St. Augustine says, a hasty running out of the right way.'*

Bilney, who was instrumental in the conversion of Hugh Latimer, first knew the future reformer as an early opponent of Luther and Melancthon's strange new ideas. Bilney is said to have entered into a private confessional, confessing his "sins" to Latimer, explaining in great detail as to how the new Reformation message was so persuasive to him. Latimer, who had expected to receive such a radical back into the arms of mother Church, now found the new radical ideas persuading him as well, and thereafter became a regular member of the White Horse Inn meetings. Latimer, along with his friend Nicholas Ridley, was burned at the stake in Oxford

under the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor. Among his last words, he was quoted as saying, *"Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as I trust shall never be put out!"*

Bilney is also said to have converted Thomas Cranmer and Robert Barnes to the gospel. Cranmer was perhaps one of the most important men of the English Reformation, and himself a martyr for the Christian faith. And Robert Barnes, along with Bilney, became the one of the primary leaders of the White Horse Inn discussions. In treatises written in the 1530's Barnes argued that *"Only faith justifieth before God,"* and that the *"Free will of man, after the fall of Adam, of his natural strength, can do nothing but sin before God."* Barnes at one point was tried on charges of heresy an imprisoned, but after his release he fled to Germany where he lived with Martin Luther for a time, and later became an assistant pastor in a Lutheran parish.

Two other White Horse Inn attendees, William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, were greatly responsible for translating the Scriptures into the English language. Tyndale worked on translating the Greek New Testament, and Coverdale translated the bulk of the Old Testament, and together they produced an English Bible for the common people, many of the phrases of which still remains in today's Authorized Version. Tyndale was burned at the stake in 1536 under Henry VIII, and Coverdale, though he was imprisoned under Mary Tudor, was later released and fled to Europe. He is said to have spent some time in Geneva, lending his efforts to the production of the Geneva Bible.

So as it turned out, most of the men who originally met at the White Horse Inn were martyred in later years, and as one writer put it, these men *"would offer their lives to procure the truths of faith that they rallied for over pints of ale in that Cambridge pub."* Thus this

was no ordinary pub. Here, these young scholars were not merely allowed to experience the cool refreshment following a single day's labour, but were somehow, by God's grace, able to taste of the powers of the coming age, and to drink deeply from the water of life.

The White Horse Inn meetings helped to forge in these men an unwavering faith in the pure, unadulterated gospel of free grace in Christ, and it is our prayer that God would once again pour out his Spirit, granting to his Church a modern Reformation”.

History on our Doorsteps

You know it is often the case that we are totally unaware of the history that lays on our doorstep. Reference is made in the above account of the Catholic Mary Tudor, during her short reign over 200 men were burnt at the stake for their faith, and the main instigator of many of those burnings was the Bishop of London Edmund Bonner. Bonner, before he moved to London was the vicar at East Dereham, Norfolk, and the town maintains the medieval cottage in which he lived as a museum.



Bonner had been rewarded by successive grants of the livings of Cherry Burton (Yorks), Ripple (Worcester), Blaydon (Durham), and East Dereham (Norfolk), and in 1535 he was made archdeacon of Leicester. He became known as Bloody Bonner because of his involvement in the death of so many martyrs.

The White Horse Inn broadcasts can be heard in this country via internet radio on www.azimuthradio.com along with many other Christian radio stations broadcasting in the USA.