

**DESCENT FROM EDWARD WIGHTMAN (1566-1612)  
OF BURTON-ON-TRENT, STAFFORDSHIRE:  
THE LAST PERSON TO BE BURNED AT  
THE STAKE FOR HERESY IN ENGLAND**

Edward Wightman (1566-1612), m.1593 Frances Darbye; parents of John Wightman (1599-1662), m.1620 Elizabeth Geanes; parents of Valentine Whitman (1624-1701), m.1651 Mary – (1630-1718); parents of Mary Whitman (1652-1720), m.1670 John Inman (1648-1712); parents of Sarah Inman (1681-1719), m.1704 Daniel Mathewson (1683-1751); parents of Mary Mathewson (1710-1751), m.1732 Moses Cooper (1711-1805); parents of Stephen Cooper (1752-1831), m.1772 Esther Evans (1754-1818); parents of Lydia Cooper (1785-1872), m.1804 Benjamin Cleveland (1783-1853); parents of Lydia Cleveland (1816-1878), m.1837 Hiram A. Ellis (1818-1880); parents of Stephen Henry Ellis (1852-1917); m.1880 Christine Olsdatter Olstad (1857-1926); parents of Lydia Priscilla Ellis (1899-1992), m.1928 Donald Hoover Lewis (1899-1977); parents of Marilyn Ruth Lewis (living), m. Dean Francis Johnson (1931-2019); parents of Paula Christine Johnson (living), m. James John Krause (living); parents of Marta Kathleen Krause (living), m. Paul Morgan Edward Webber (living); parents of Kenneth Jay Webber (living).



Edward Wightman told people that he believed that the soul does not leave the body upon death, but rather stays with the body until Judgment Day, at which point it either ascends to heaven or descends to hell. Later, according to interrogators, he declared concerning himself that he “affirmed my self to be that prophet promised in the 18 of Deuteronomie. And that Elyas in the 4th of Malachie promised to be sent before the great and fearful day of the Lord. And that comfortor in the 16th of John which should convince the world of sin of righteousness and of Judgment.”


In April 1611 a warrant was issued for Edward’s arrest by order of King James. The order instructed the church constables of Burton to take him before Bishop Richard Neil for interrogation regarding his religious views. The trial was held on November 19, 26, 29, and December 2-5, 1611. On December 5, Edward was brought before the court for his final appearance. Edward did not attempt to defend himself. Instead, he attempted to educate the court on the righteousness and intellectual rigor of his arguments, “clarifying” the court’s conception of his heresies.

Sentencing on December 14, 1611, included eleven distinct heresies. Part of the charge was that he believed “that the baptizing of infants was an abominable custom; that the doctrine was a total fabrication and that Christ was only a mere man and not the son of God; that the Lord’s Supper and baptism were not to be celebrated; and that Christianity was not wholly professed and preached in the Church of England, but only in part.” Other charges included several equally radical opinions.

After months of being subjected to a series of conferences with “learned divines,” Wightman was finally brought before Bishop Neil for the last time. He refused to change any of his views, and was sentenced to be excommunicated and condemned to be burned at the stake following approval by the King. Prior to his execution, he was to be placed in a public open place as an example to others who might harbor similar beliefs.

When the execution day arrived on March 20, 1612, Edward was tied to a post on the square in Lichfield next to Saint Mary’s Church, and the fire was lit under him. On feeling the heat, Edward screamed out in recantation and was pulled down, already badly burned. A written retraction was hurriedly prepared and Edward, in pain and weakness, orally agreed to it as it was read to him. Later, however, no longer fearing the flames, he refused to sign the retraction and blasphemed louder than before.

King James re-approved his execution and a few weeks later, on April 11, he was once more led to the stake. Once again, on feeling the intense heat of the fire, Wightman cried out in recantation, but this time the sheriff told him he would cost him no more and commanded more faggots to be thrown on to make the flames roar. Edward was burned to ashes.



EDWARD WIGHTMAN  
OF BURTON-ON-TRENT  
WAS BURNT AT THE STAKE  
IN THIS MARKET PLACE  
FOR HERESY  
II<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 1612  
BEING THE LAST PERSON  
IN ENGLAND SO TO DIE.

A NARRATION of the Burning of Edward Wightman.

James R.

JAMES by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defendor of the Faith, &c.

To our right Trusty and right Welbeloved Councillor, Thomas Lord Ellesmere our Chancellour of England, Greeting.

Where the Reverend Father in God, Richard Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, having judicially proceeded in the Examination, Hearing and Determining of a Cause of Heresie against Edward Wightman of the Parish of Burton upon Trent in the Diocess of Coventry and Lichfield, concerning the wicked Heresies of the Ebionites, Cerinthians, Valentinians, Arrians, Macedonians, of Simon Magus, of Manes, Manichees, of Photinus, and Anabaptists, and of other Heretical, Execrable, and unheard of Opinions, by the instinct of Satan, by him excogitated and holden, viz.

That there is not the Trinity of Persons, the Father, the Son, and the holy Ghost, in the Unity of the Deity. 2. That Jesus Christ is not the true natural Son of God, perfect God, and of the same Substance, Eternity and Majesty with the Father in respect of his Godhead. 3. That Jesus Christ is only Man and a meer Creature, and not both God and man in one Person. 4. That Christ our Saviour took not humane flesh of the substance of the Virgin Mary his Mother; and that That Promise, The seed of the Woman shall break the serpents head, was not fulfilled in Christ. 5. That the Person of the holy Ghost is not God coequal, coeternal, and coessential with the Father and the Son. 6. That the three Creeds, viz. The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasius Creed are the Heresies of the Nicolaitanes. 7. That he the said Edward Wightman is that Prophet spoken of in the eighteenth of Deutronomy in these words, I will raise them up a Prophet, &c. And that That place of Isaiah, I alone have troden the wine-press: And that That place, Whose fan is in his hand, are proper and personal to him, the said Edward Wightman. 8. And that he the said Wightman is that Person of the holy Ghost spoken of in the Scriptures; and the Comforter spoken of in the sixteenth of St Johns Gospel. 9. And that those words of our Saviour Christ of the sin of blaspemy against the holy Ghost, are meant of his person. 10. And that That place the fourth of Malachy, of Elias to come, is likewise meant of his person. 11. That the Soul doth sleep in the sleep of the first death, as well as the body, and is mortall as touching the sleep of the first death, as the body is: And that the Soul of our Saviour Jesus Christ did sleep in that sleep of death as well as his body. 12. That the Souls of the elect Saints departed, are not Members possessed of the triumphant Church in Heaven. 13. That the baptizing of Infants is an abominable custom. 14. That there ought not be in the Church the use of the Lords Supper to be celebrated in the Elements of Bread and Wine: And the use of Baptism to be celebrated in the Element of Water, as they are now practised in the Church of England. But that the use of Baptism is to be Administred in Water, only to Converts of sufficient age of understanding, converted from Infidelity to the Faith. 15. That God hath ordained and sent him, the said Edward Wightman, to perform his part in the work of the Salvation of the world, to deliver it by his teaching or admonition from the Heresie of the Nicolaitanes, as Christ was ordained and sent to save the world, and by his death to deliver it from sin, and to reconcile it to God. 16. And that Christianity is not wholly professed and preached in the Church of England, but only in part. Wherein he the said Edward Wightman hath before the said Revered Father, as also before our Commissioners for causes Ecclesiastical within our Realm of England, maintained his said most

perillous and dangerous Opinions, as appeareth by many his Confessions, as also by a Book written and subscribed by him, and given to us. For the which his Damnable and Heretical Opinions, he is by Divine sentence declared by the said Reverend Father, the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, with the advice and consent of Learned Divines, and other Learned in the Laws assisting him in Judgement, justly adjudged, pronounced and declared to be an obstinate and incorrigible Heretick, and is left by them under the Sentence of the great Excommunication, and therefore as a corrupt member to be cut off from the rest of the flock of Christ, lest he should infect others professing the true Christian Faith: and is to be by Our secular Power and Authority as an Heretick punished: As by the Significavit of the said Reverend Father in God the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, bearing Date at Lichfield the fourteenth day of December in the ninth year of our Reign, and remaining in our Court of Chancery more at large appeareth. And although the said Edward Wightman hath since the said Sentence pronounced against him, been often very charitably moved and exhorted, as well by the said Bishop, as by many other Godly, Grave and Learned Divines to dissuade, revoke, and remove him from the said blasphemous, Heretical and Anabaptistical Opinions; Yet he arrogantly and wilfully persisteth and continueth in the same. We therefore, according to Our Regal Function and Office, minding the execution of Justice in this behalf, and to give example to others lest they should attempt the like hereafter, have determined by the assent of Our Council to will and require, and do hereby authorize and require you Our said Chancellor immediatly upon the receipt hereof to Award and make out under Our great Seal of England, Our Writ of Execution according to the tenor in these presents ensuing. And these presents shall be your sufficient Warrant and discharge for the same.

REx Vic' Civitatis nostrae Lich. salutem; Cum Reverendus in Christo Pater Richardus providentia Divina Coventr' & Lich' Episcopus nobis significaverit, quod ipse contra & adversus quendam Edwardum Wightman Parochiae de Burton super Trent Coventr' & Lich' Dioces. de & super nephandis heresibus Ebionis, Cerinthi, Valentiniani, Arrii, Macedonii, Simonis Magi, Manetis, Manechiorum, Photini, & Anabaptistarum aliorum (que) heresiarcharum, & insuper de aliis execrandis opinionibus instinctu Satana excogitatis & antehac inauditis, juxta Canonum Ecclesiasticorum legum (que) & consuetudinum hujus Regni nostri Angl' exigentiam judicialit' procedens, praedictus Edwardus Wightman coram praefato Reverendo Patre ac aliis Theologis & jurisperitis sibi in judicio assistantibus comparens, praedicta nephanda crimina haereses ac alia detestanda blasphemia & Errores contumaciter & ex quadam pertinacia scienter maliciose animo (que) obdurato publicavit defendebat & disseminabat, per sententiam definitivam ejusdem Reverendi Patris cum consensu Theologorum & jurisperitorum praedictorum juste Legitime & Canonice contra eundem Edwardum Wightman in ea parte latam heretic' adjudicat' & pronunciat' existit; & ideo tanquam ovem morbidam è grege Domini ne subditos nostros sua contagione inficiet ejiciendum & eliminandum fore decreverit: Cum igitur Sancta Mater Ecclesia non habeat quod ulterius in hac parte facere & exequi debeat, idem Reverendus Pater eundem Edwardum Wightman ut blasphemum & damnatum Haereticum brachio nostro seculari reliquit, condigna animadversione plectend' prout per Literas Patentes praefati Reverendi Patris Episcopi Coventr' & Lich' in hac parte superinde confect' nobis in Cancellar' nostram certificat' est. Nos igitur ut zelator justitiae & fidei Catholicae defensor: Volentes (que) Ecclesiam Sanctam ac jura & libertates ejusdem & fidem Catholicam manutenere & defendere, ac hujusmodi Haereses & Errores ubi (que) (quantum in nobis est) eradicare & extirpare, ac Haereticos sic convictos animadversione condigna puniri, attendentes (que) hujusmodi Haereticum in forma praedicta convictum & damnatum juxta leges & consuetudinem Regui nostri Angliae in hac parte consuet' ignis incendio comburi debere; Tibi praecipimus quod dict. Edwardum Wightman in custodia tua existent' in aliquo loco publico & aperto infra Civitatem praedict' ex causa pramissa coram populo publice igni committi, & ipsum Edwardum Wightman in eodem igne realiter comburi fac' in hujusmodi criminis detestationem aliorum (que) Christianorum exemplum manifestum, ne in

simile crimen labantur. Et hoc sub periculo incumbenti nullatenus omittas. Teste, &c.

Henry Hibaite.

This containeth a Warrant to be granted by Your Majesty unto the Lord Chancellour of England, for the Awarding of a Writ under the Great Seal of England, to the Sheriff of the City of Lichfield, for the burning of Edward Wightman who is convicted of divers horrible Heresies before the Bishop of Coventrey and Lichfield, and by his Sentence left to the secular Power, as is by the said Bishop certified to Your Majesty, into Your Highness Court of Chancery.

And is done by force of Your Majesties Commandment to me given under Your Highness Sign Manuel.

Henry Hibaite.

THE King to the Sheriff of Our City of Lichfield, Greeting. Whereas the Reverend Father in Christ, Richard by Divine Providence of Coventrey and Lichfield Bishop, hath signified unto us that he judicially proceeding, according to the exigence of the Ecclesiastical Canons, and of the Laws and Customes of this Our Kingdome of England, against one Edward Wightman of the Parish of Burton upon Trent, in the Diocess of Coventrey and Lichfield, of and upon the wicked Heresies of Ebion, Cerinthus, Valentinian, Arrius, Macedonius, Simon Magus, of Manes, Manichees, Photinus, and of the Anabaptists, and other Arch-Hereticks, and moreover of other cursed Opinions belched by the instinct of Satan excogitated and heretofore unheard of, the aforesaid Edward Wightman appearing before the aforesaid Reverend Father and other Divines, and Learned in the Law, assisting him in Judgement, the aforesaid wicked Crimes, Heresies and other detestable Blasphemies and Errours stubbornly and pertinaciously, knowingly, maliciously, and with an hardened heart, published, defended and dispersed, by definitive Sentence of the said Reverend Father, with the consent of Divines, Learned in the Law aforesaid, Justly, Lawfully and Canonically against the said Edward Wightman in that part brought, stands Adjudged and Pronounced an Heretick, and therefore as a diseased Sheep out of the Flock of the Lord, lest Our Subjects he do infect by his contagion, he hath decreed to be cast out and cut off. Whereas therefore the holy Mother Church hath not further in this part what it ought more to do and prosecute, the same Reverend Father, the same Edward Wightman as a Blasphemous and condemned Heretick, hath left to Our secular Power to be punished with condign punishment, as by the Letters Patents of the aforesaid Reverend Father the Bishop of Coventrey and Lichfield in this behalf thereupon made is certified unto Us into Our Chancery. We therefore as a zelot of Justice and a Defend or of the Catholike Faith, and willing that the holy Church and the Rights and Liberties of the same and the Catholike Faith to Maintain and Defend, and such like Heresies and Errors every where so much as in us lies to root out and extirpate, and Hereticks so convict to punish with condign punishment, holding that such an Heretick in the aforesaid form convict and condemned according to the Laws and Customes of this Our Kingdome of England in this part accustomed ought to be burned with fire, We command thee that thou cause the said Edward Wightman being in thy custody to be committed to the fire in some publike and open place below the City aforesaid, for the cause aforesaid, before the people, and the same Edward Wightman in the same fire cause really to be Burned in the detestation of the said Crime and for manifest example of other Christians, that they may not fall into the same Crime, and this no waies omit, under the peril that shall follow thereon. Witness, &c.

1611. Expedit' apud Westm' Nono die Martii Anno Regis Jacobi Angl' &c. Nono. per Windebank.