

WHITFORD, RICHARD (died 1542?), priest and author

Name: Richard Whitford
Date of death: 1542?
Gender: Male
Occupation: priest and author
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Religion
Author: Robert Thomas Jenkins

It is thought that he was born at Whitford, Flintshire; he had an uncle of the same name who had an estate in Hopeland, which he left (with other property in Lancashire) to his nephew John Edwards, his sister's son; and it appears that another member of the family was Hugh Whitford who was rector of Whitford, 1537-60. Richard entered Queens' College, Cambridge, 1495, and was elected to a Fellowship there in 1497 (he held it until 1504), when he went to the Continent as chaplain to lord Mountjoy. As the illustrious scholar Erasmus was Mountjoy's tutor, a close friendship sprang up between Erasmus and Whitford, another great friend of both of them being Sir Thomas More - letters which passed between the three are still extant. Erasmus returned to England with Mountjoy and Whitford, and for some time lived with the latter at Oxford and Cambridge - it was the fact that he stayed with him in Oxford which probably caused Anthony Wood to say that Whitford was an Oxford student. About 1500 he was appointed chaplain to Richard Foxe, bishop of Winchester, although at that time he apparently had no very high opinion of Foxe (it should be pointed out that the *D.N.B.* doubts whether he was, in fact, the author of the attack on Foxe attributed to him). In 1507 he joined the convent of Syon House, Isleworth (a convent of nuns, but inhabited also by a few canons - chaplains and confessors); his uncle, Richard Whitford, was already there and died there in 1511 - see the extract of his will in *Archæologia Cambrensis*, 1880, 221, but the note at the bottom of the page is unreliable. Richard, the younger, spent his time in the convent writing devotional books for the nuns, but the books had a considerable circulation outside the convent walls. When the king's commissioner visited Syon House (1534) with a view to its dissolution, he was fearlessly opposed by Whitford. For all that, the convent was forcibly closed in 1539, and from that time on Whitford was looked after by Mountjoy. He was alive in 1541; but in a copy of one of his books, now at Lambeth, under the words 'the olde wretched brother of Syon,' a contemporary hand has added 'ob. an. Dni. 1542'; so, it may be assumed that that was the year of his death, though some believe that he lingered on almost until the end of queen Mary's reign.

The *D.N.B.* gives a list of sixteen books published by him, while [archdeacon A. O. Evans](#) has added four more titles. The most important was his English translation of Thomas a Kempis's *Imitatio* (though it should be noted that Whitford attributed the book to Jean Gerson). The translation first appeared under Whitford's name in 1556, but it was published anonymously in 1531, and had been reprinted four times in the meantime. Ronald Bayne (the author of the article in the *D.N.B.*) judged Whitford's version to be 'in style and feeling the finest rendering into English of the original.'

Author

Emeritus Professor Robert Thomas Jenkins, (1881 - 1969)

Sources

Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*

letters 89 and 191 in P. S. Allen's edition of the letters of Erasmus - see also i, 225

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

A. O. Evans, in *Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society*, iv, 7-14, 28-9; v, 57-9

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Richard Whitford](#)

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