

***“His excellent sentences were received
as so many expressions of treason”***

**To what extent did Hus, or the idea
of Hussitism, exert an influence in England
after his execution in 1415?**

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Much admirable work has been written relating to the influence of Oxford and England on the nascent Hussite movement and on the thinking of Hus himself. There is, however, very little that addresses influences coming in the other direction, the extent to which the example and thought of Hus was received and had influence in England in the period after 1415. This paper is conceived as an Oxonian attempt at counter balance. It is arguable that the two nations which underwent the greatest religious turmoil at the start of the fifteenth century, were England and Bohemia, with the movements (defined in the very broadest possible of terms) of Lollardy and Hussitism respectively. Yet, for two movements with such similar origins in the pan-European Wyclifite underworld of the great continental universities, the divergence could not have been more different.

By the 1450s the ‘vitality’ of Lollardy was gone and England was once again ‘Our Lady’s Dowry.’¹ In stark contrast, Utraquism was establishing a hierarchy and a clear place in Bohemian national life. That is not to say Hus’s influence on England was negligible. The links between England and Bohemia remained strong, not least in the minds of those leading the reaction against heresy in England and the rest of Europe at the time. It was, rather, more the fear of Hus and the Bohemian example that spurred powerful bishops such as Fleming and Beaufort in their repressive efforts than terror at the mutterings of the peasantry around Coventry, or a resurrected Lollard leader/soldier such as Sir John Oldcastle. In short, I would argue that Hus’s influence on England was a negative one – in that he encapsulated exactly what the establishment feared might be replicated in Oxford, Cambridge, and London or with concomitant social implications in wider society. This ‘negative’ influence extends throughout until the sixteenth century English Reformation really takes hold and, even then, in the writings of Cranmer, Foxe and the

¹ Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation, Wycliffite texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988) 8–10.

eccentric Bishop Aylmer, the example of Hus is not cited for his theological virtue, but rather as a demonstrative case in point of the inherent wickedness of the Church of Rome and, due to the influence of Wyclif, the nascent Protestant piety of England and her Church.

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For Oxford the year 1427–28 was tumultuous. It saw the attempts at reform of the university by the vigorous opponent of heresy, the Bishop of Lincoln, Richard Fleming. Oxford was within the diocese of Lincoln (it was not itself a diocese until the Reformation). Thus, with the seat of episcopal authority some 150 miles away from the great university, it could provide fertile ground for dissent in the pre-Reformation period. Fleming's first move against heresy was to lay out the statutes for a new college, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and All Saints, now known as Lincoln College. In his preface to the statutes he makes it very clear that the college was to provide learned scholars to combat new and heretical doctrines.² Over the next 100 years, the colleges of Magdalen, Corpus Christi and All Souls would follow suit in prioritising the combat of heretical doctrine in their statutes.³ Fleming also enacted a personal command of Pope Martin V and ordered the burning of Wyclif's bones as a tangible statement against academic heresy.⁴ Tellingly these events occurred in the late 1420s. They have often been identified as a reaction against Lollardy. Yet even before the 1420s, Lollardy had ceased to be an academic, Wyclifite movement associated with scholars such as Peter Payne and statesmen such as Sir John Oldcastle, who had either fled the country (mostly to Bohemia as in the case of Payne) or had been executed (as in the case of Oldcastle). Both Payne and Oldcastle were completely removed from the English religious/political scene by 1417. Instead of the academic and political movement of the period immediately after Wyclif's death, what was known as Lollardy had morphed into a blanket term for expressions of religious and social dissatisfaction by localised peasantry or yeomen. For example, in the diocese of Norwich only one priest was tried for heresy between 1428–1431, the rest of those tried being peasants or yeomen. In these cases, the complaints rarely went along coherent theological lines, but rather they concern popular piety, e.g. objection to the local shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.⁵

Similar local specific expressions of popular dissent grouped under the umbrella of Lollardy might be found in London, Coventry and Bristol at the

² Statutes of Lincoln College, Oxon., "Praefatio domini Ricardi Fleming," [*Statutes of Oxford Colleges*, Lincoln, i] (London, 1853) 4–6.

³ J. A. F. Thomson, *Later Lollards* (Oxford, 1968) 212.

⁴ *Records of Norwich Heresy Trials 1428–31*, ed. Norman P. Turner [Royal Historical Society] (London, 1977) 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

time.⁶ Crucially the theology of Lollardy had also significantly departed from its more respectable academic and philosophical origins with tendencies towards Millenarian doctrine (akin to the contemporary Taborties in Bohemia). Ideas such as that of the invisible universal Church, the 'real' Pope being actually the holiest simple person alive on earth at that time and a literal understanding of the priesthood of all believers, inevitably did not invite much noble or clerical support. The great expulsions and reaction that occurred in Oxford in the period 1414–1415 had already removed academic Lollards, but, even this had more to do with continental heresy than domestic unrest. Wyclif's bones were removed from consecrated ground in 1415 because of his leading role in influencing the heretic Hus.⁷ Similarly Peter Payne was ejected from St Edmund Hall for his links with Bohemian heresy, not his excessive influence over 'lolling' English peasants. As well as these specific Oxonian events, wider parliamentary acts such as the *De Heretico Comburendo* of 1401, the 1414 local Leicester Statute against the Lollards and, crucially, the defeat of Oldcastle's rebellion in 1415 had 'sealed' the fate of Lollardy as anything other than a disparate peasant movement long before the late 1420s.⁸ In short, given the accepted changes to Lollardy at the time, it would be surprising if Bishop Fleming's campaign of the late 1420s was entirely motivated by a desire to shield scholars from the influence of something identifiable as Lollardy given its effective death as an academic heresy after 1414. Rather it would appear that he, and others, had the wider European situation in mind.

This was a period when the international reaction against Hussite heresy in Bohemia was at its height, a fact that did not go unnoticed in England. At the pope's suggestion, Bishop Fleming exhumed and burned the bones of Wyclif (a particular favourite of Martin V, Fleming had earlier been recommended by the pope to the archiepiscopal see of York, but that nomination went unapproved by the Royal Council). Crucially, Fleming had spent two years at the Council of Constance in the period directly after Hus' execution (1416–1418) and so would have been acutely aware of the situation in Europe and the centrality of Hus and the Prague Masters in initiating and spreading the heresy that was at this point engulfing the lands of the Czech Crown. He and the other ecclesiastical authorities were intensely aware of the fluidity and interlinked nature of international scholarship at the time. The court of the deposed Richard II and Anne of Bohemia had been a centre for Anglo-Bohemian dialogue. Peter Payne's flight from St Edmund Hall to Prague did not go unnoticed. And, finally, at the trials of Oldcastle and Payne's pupil, one Ralph Mungyn, letters to Bohemia and to Hus specifically were used as evidence of heresy and treason.⁹

⁶ J. A. F. Thomson, *Later Lollards* (Oxford 1968) 139.

⁷ Bertie Wilkinson, *The Later Middle Ages in England* (Cambridge, 1977) 218.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁹ J. A. F. Thomson, *Later Lollards* (Oxford, 1968) 144–145.

Bishop Fleming's link with the Papacy (and proven desire to implement its official policies) and clear awareness of the international situation suggest that the bishop's references to heresy in his official statutes were perhaps more likely to indicate the academic influences of Hus and Jerome of Prague and their potential influences than the mutterings of a disgruntled English peasantry. Importantly, there is no evidence of Hus's actual writings circulating in Oxford at the time and, given that Fleming and the rest of the University authorities were prolific in their burning of heretical tracts in the post-Wyclif period, they were unlikely to have lasted long when they did. Rather, what we see is Hus and Bohemia as convenient, but largely symbolic, bogeymen for parts of the English Church. The masters of Prague University and Hus in particular, served as cautionary tales for any academics hoping to follow Wyclif and therefore stray from the newer, more strictly controlled academic path that bishops such as Fleming, Waynfleet of Winchester (founder of Magdalen) and Chichele of Canterbury (founder of All Souls) were trying to establish by their founding of the new colleges and formalisation of statutes.

Fleming was not the only one with awareness of the Bohemian situation and whose actions were arguably influenced by it and by reaction against the perceived teachings of Hus. There is ample reference to the Bohemian situation in England at the time, but exclusively in an anti-Hussite way. For instance we see Pope Martin's crusade voted on and supported by the Convocation of the Diocese of Durham and being preached in Yorkshire, when one John Pigot Esquire gives ten marks to sustain the campaign in Bohemia.¹⁰ Both of these northern dioceses had little or no history of Lollard insurrection, yet references to combating heresy are plentiful, especially in the records of the Diocese of Durham. This, combined with the preaching tours and financial contributions in favour of the crusades against the Hussites suggest that here, as in other places, when heresy was discussed, it was often associated with Hus and Bohemia.

One figure who looms large over English engagement with the Hussite crusade is Henry Cardinal Beaufort, bishop first of Lincoln, then Winchester. A half-brother of the Lancastrian Henry IV, Beaufort was in the vanguard of a coup that overthrew a court sympathetic to Wyclifite innovations and, crucially with regard to international influences, its Bohemian queen, Anne. This political change was critical for turning England from a place where the intellectual and ecclesiastical elite were sympathetic to ecclesiastical reform and open to the exchange of ideas between England and Bohemia to one which was instinctive in its obedience to the Papacy and determined to suppress potential heterodoxy at its great universities. Given his personally combined roles as Lord Chancellor, Chancellor of the University of Oxford, and successive bishop of two important sees, Beaufort was a dominant figure in the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193 (10 Marks = £32K or CZK 1.2M today).

ecclesiastical, legal, and intellectual spheres in England during the period of suppression of Lollardy. His achievements were impressive, culminating in the great expulsions from Oxford in 1414 and the execution of Oldcastle in 1417. This success soon caught the attention of Martin V, who created Beaufort a cardinal in 1426. The cardinal subsequently became the leader of the fourth Crusade against the Hussites in 1427. Beaufort's mandates and exhortations against the Hussites were read throughout England and, as we have seen, money poured in from across the country to help the cardinal's cause.¹¹ By the late 1420s, under Beaufort's leadership, England arguably played a greater role than most other European nations in the crusades against the Hussites, sending money, commanders, and troops. Beaufort's rise to power is perhaps symbolic of the rapid changes in English political, ecclesiastical, and academic life wherein regard for Hus changed from one whom academics and gentry admired, to a figure vilified and denounced.

It seems justifiable to postulate that references made to heresy in the late 1420s in Oxford are more likely to be references to the Bohemian situation than to any domestic heterodoxy. This is so especially in the light of: (1) the decline of Lollardy, (2) the centrality of Beaufort in national life, (3) England's willing part in the papal actions against the Hussites, and (4) the authorities' awareness of the fluid and international nature of potentially heretical dialogue. Hus and Hussites became bywords for academic heresy both as demonstrated in the trial of Ralph Mungyn of St Edmund Hall and by the new authorities' attempts to reform and make the universities more orthodox, as seen in Fleming's statutes for Lincoln College. After his death, the idea of Hus in the English late medieval mind was of one associated with international, academic heresy but also a name inherently associated with the widely disliked previous English regime of Richard II and his Bohemian queen. It was convenient for Beaufort and his fellow Lancastrians to associate that reign with all forms of moral corruption, including heresy. England had first to be purged of the Wyclifite error and then, with the papal crusade, Bohemia itself was to be cleansed of the subsequent heretical infection. We do not therefore see any real theological analysis of Hus' writings and reforms, nor links with Hussite leaders in Bohemia. Rather, Hus and the Hussites exerted an influence only in their being typical of heretics and heresy that the international academic community, and the new English Lancastrian regime, were set to defeat.

There are, of course, positive English representations of and allusions to Hus and the Hussites. They appear, however, a century later and in common with any previous influence they may be said to have exerted over English ecclesiastical and intellectual life are largely symbolic. In neither case was English theology, philosophy, liturgy, or ecclesiology affected. As may be expected, positive aspects of reception date from the period of the English

¹¹ Loc. cit.

reformation. As Henry VIII's quarrel with Rome over his divorce became greater, Protestants in England sensed an opportunity. After the mid-1530s, a wider availability of Protestant tracts reintroduced Hus and the Hussite experience to England in a different light. However, this was not a direct transition from Prague. It is critical that almost all continental reforming literature made its way to England via Antwerp (where Tyndale was working on his English Bible translation).¹² As a consequence, once again, English images of the influence of Hus are not taken from direct experience of or communication with the Hussites still extant in Bohemia, nor from analysis of the work of Hus. Rather, they are coloured by the use of Hus at the hands of other continental reformers, most notably Luther. Often, however, Hussite experience is given a specifically 'English' edge. This ranges from the use by Archbishop Cranmer and John Foxe of Hus's martyrdom to demonstrate the error of Rome (and the implied supremacy of the King over the Church), to the bizarre appropriation of Hus by Bishop Aylmer of London, a man who famously exhorted his flock to thank God seven times a day, because they had been born English.¹³ It is with Aylmer that the idea that "Wyclif begat Hus[se] who begat Luther who begat truth" began. It is telling that Aylmer chooses Hus rather than the Lollards as the keeper of Wyclif's reforming flame, arguably demonstrating the perceived pedigree of the English Reformation in the academic world of the pre-Reformation era. Such a pedigree may be seen as proof that by the sixteenth century Bishop Fleming's efforts had failed. Although this is ostensibly a different usage of the *persona* of Hus and in a different time, the essence of the influence of Hus (i.e. he is only seen as important in relation to English figures) remains the same. Whereas Fleming and Beaufort were contemptuous and suspicious of Hus and his influence, Aylmer praised him. Each, however, essentially viewed Hus as merely a negative or positive exemplar for their own arguments.

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Even in the more respected works of the English Reformation, such as the works of Cranmer and Foxe's famous *Book of Martyrs*, Hus is appropriated as a polemically useful bridging figure, rather than seen as a theologian or reformer of any use or interest in or of himself. For example, he merits only one mention in Cranmer's *Confutation*, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the chapter against general Councils. His purpose is to show the deviation of the recent Councils of the Church of Rome from the ancient Councils and creeds of the

¹² Andrew Pettegree, "Printing and the Reformation," in *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge, 2002) 169.

¹³ In John Aylmer's *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trew Subjects*, 1559 quoted in William Haller, "Foxe and The Puritan Revolution," in *Studies in English Thought and Literature from Bacon to Pope*, ed. Richard Foster Jones (Stanford, 1951) 209.

primitive church. He identifies Hus and Jerome of Prague as condemned for holding that Christ was fully human and fully divine, a 'heresy' held by the Athanasian Creed and yet, Cranmer notes, "these malicious clergy [of the Council of Constance] were not ashamed to condemn the same for heresy."¹⁴ Hus' doctrine is mentioned, but there is no sense of it directly influencing the thought of Cranmer. Rather Cranmer, in common with his late medieval episcopal forebears, simply uses the example of Hus and Jerome as a rhetorical device. Whilst Cranmer clearly does express sympathy for Hus' doctrine, it is only because it is in agreement with that of the Early Church. One wonders whether Cranmer, resident in Lambeth Palace and architect of the most magisterial of Reformations, would have been so generous in an assessment of Hus's exhortations to clerical poverty.

The other important writer of the English Reformation to make use of Hus is John Foxe, in his famous martyrology. *Acts and Monuments* was first published in 1563 and, like Cranmer's work, sought to root the Protestant movement in England to the early Church, in this case, through the link of martyrdom at the hands of Rome, in either imperial or papal form. Foxe's aim is to place Hus within the wider chronology of martyrdom, but also to connect the Bohemian reformation to that of England. He makes regular reference to the honourable role that he perceived the nobility of Bohemia and Poland to have played in Hus's trial and in the subsequent persecution of Hussites by Pope and Emperor.¹⁵ This can be of little surprise given Foxe's reliance on sympathetic nobles and patrons and the political nature of the Reformation in England. The nobility were direct beneficiaries of land and money taken from the church in the dissolution of monasticism, receiving patronage from the crown. To show a clear precedent for an aristocratically led reformation was a core aim of Foxe (it occurs in his descriptions of the persecutions in Germany as well). This not only justified the English reformation as it had already occurred but also encouraged the nobility of England in the face of uncertain times ahead. Even with the Marian reaction (1553–1558) over, the future glories of the Elizabethan age and the security of an Anglican ascendancy were by no means a sure thing by 1563.

Furthermore, Foxe's lack of real knowledge of the Hussite situation is revealed by his absolute failure to mention the reign of Jiří of Poděbrady or Jan Rokycana. Given his desire to justify the Church of England's position, it would have made sense to underline the periods where Hus's successors came closest to achieving an established Church closer to the later English model. Yet Foxe makes mention only of the persecutions, suggesting his knowledge of Hus and the Hussite movement was filtered directly through

¹⁴ Thomas Cranmer, *Miscellaneous Works and Writings of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge, 1846) 37

¹⁵ John Foxe, *Universal History of Christian Martyrdom* (London, 1817) 117–120,

the narrative of continental Protestantism.¹⁶ This narrative preferred to emphasise Hus as a dejected John the Baptist figure to Luther's Christ, rather than identify Hussitism as a continuous, independent movement. Again we see that Hus is viewed as a useful exemplar with whom parallels might be drawn, but nothing more. With regard to doctrine, Foxe merely notes that Hus was "strongly attached to the doctrines of Wyclif."¹⁷ Given that Hus and Wyclif differed strongly on a number of issues (not least the central issue of the eucharist) and it was on his own doctrine, rather than Wyclif's, that Hus was condemned at Constance, we must assume that Foxe had no knowledge of or interest in Hus's doctrine or teaching. Again, Hus is only perceived as relevant in his links with England and the example he might set as a type of academic reformer. In this sense, by viewing Hus and Hussitism more as symbols than as independent entities of reform, Foxe is no different in his attitudes than Fleming and Beaufort before him.

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Finally, there is no tangible evidence of knowledge of any of Hus's doctrine or teaching, or even tangible evidence of his work being present in England in the Reformation period. The inclusion of Hus' work on a list of banned books given by Archbishop William Warham to the Bishop of Exeter in 1526, could suggest previous evidence of Hus' work in the country. It may be, however, that Archbishop Warham was simply replicating a list of books subject to a wider papal ban. If they were present then they were almost certainly smuggled in through the North Sea ports near to Cambridge. But, as mentioned, if indeed they were present, then they may have been susceptible to Lutheran editing in transit.¹⁸

Given the difficulties of access to Hus's work in England between 1415 and 1540, it can come of little surprise that he became little more than a symbol, and a very mutable one at that. First he appears as a model of intellectual heresy and, by a *volte face* of Roman injustice a century later. The idea of Hus and the Hussites was undoubtedly strong in the minds of the intellectual elite in England, and later through Foxe, in the common people also, for several centuries after his execution. However, the idea was just that: symbolic, eminently mutable depending on what the English political situation demanded and with no regard to the specific theological, political, or philosophical implications of the Hussite movement. In short, Hus did have an influence, but not in or of himself. He was, rather, always viewed through the lenses of official papal policy (by the enforcers of the initial Lancastrian reaction) or through the typical Protestant viewpoint of seeing Hus as a voice making

¹⁶ Ibid., 105: "His excellent sentences were received as so many expressions of treason."

¹⁷ Ibid., 118.

¹⁸ David McKitterick, *A History of Cambridge University Press* (Cambridge, 1992) 24.

straight the way for Luther and, by extension, for the English reformers. It is testament to the success of men like Beaufort and Fleming that direct contact between England and Bohemia, so vibrant at the start of the fifteenth century, had been reduced to hearsay and half-remembered symbolism by the middle of the sixteenth. There was no knowledge of Hus' work, no need to write responses in support or opposition. He was a useful tool to trace the flames of continental reform back to the spark of Wyclif in England, or as an exemplary stick with which to beat Rome, but little more. Despite Oxford and England's crucial role in the burgeoning Bohemian reformation, by the time reform took hold in England, Bohemia had become the "far off land of which we know nothing" in the English imagination. It was to remain so in many ways.