

# The Crown and the Lollards in Later Medieval England

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*A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, hogyan viszonyult az angol királyi hatalom az wiklifita lollard eretnekséghez a 14. század végén és a 15. század elején. II. Richárd (1377-99), IV. Henrik (1399-1413) és V. Henrik (1413-22) uralkodása alatt megfigyelhető, hogy a királyi hatalom meglepő toleranciával viselkedett John Wycliffe követői iránt, és a központi intézményrendszer, az adminisztratív-vegyrehozó szervek igen megengedőek és elnézőek voltak, sokszor még az eretneknek elítélésére bízott bíróságok, mi több, maguk a prelátusok és az egyházi felső- és középréteg tagjai szemet hunytak a nyilvánvalóan heretikus cselekedetek felett. Számos 'hírbetelt' lollard prédikátor egészen szabadon prédikálhatott országgyűzre, még az 1401-es, az eretnek tanok bírdelési főbengári vélekedek kiemondó és a hűnösöket kötelezően halállal sújtó De heretico comburendo statutum után is. A tanulmány annak okait vizsgálja, hogy a királyi hatalom miért vonakodott ily módon meghuntetni a lollardokat, mi állhatott az effajta opportunistá politika hátterében.*

*II. Richárd uralkodása alatt jellehetően a lollard hível társadalmi státusa és a királyi udvarban elfoglalt magas pozíciói miatt viselkedett a király megértően s igen türelmesen az ún. Lollard lovagokkal szemben. A wiklifita-ollard tanok ugyanis meglehetősen markánsan jelentkeztek egy bizonyos udvari lovagi, háztartásbeli lovagi csoportosulás körében (Stury, Clanvow, Montagu stb.), így a király eretnkséggel szembeni politikája szorosan összefüggött a patronálási szerzőmájával (patronage). A király informális uralkodói környezetében, kormányában (Königshof) nagy számban találunk ún. lollard lovagokat, akik Richárd uralmi kormányzati rendszerében fontos szerepet játszottak. Az is megmagyarázhatta a toleranciát, hogy a wiklifita tanok bizonyos elemei igen népszerűek voltak gondolkunk csak az egyház világi hatalmát, földi vagyonát, az egyházi udlokat megkérdőjelező álláspontra, vagy a pápaellenes, antiklerikális szölkumokra - már III. Edward uralkodásának a végén (1327-77), s az udvar jelentős személyiségei, mint például John of Gaunt, Lancaster hercege is szimpátiával fordult John Wycliffe és követői felé. A középbirtokos nemesség, az Alsóházban ülo gentry pedig nagyon sokáig feltrtken szimpátiájáról bizosította a wiklifita prédikátorokat. Vidéki birtokközpontjaikban főbben menedékházakat rendeztek be a lollard tanok bírdelési számára; udvari méltóságot betöllo bárók alapítottak könyvtárakat az Oxfordból hivatalosan kiűzött lollardok számára; királyi jogok alá tartozó plébániatemplumokban helyet bizosítottak országgyűzre 'hivatalosan' közigyoll eretnek papoknak; könyvmásoló szegmeket működtettek. Mindez ötfogdeken keresztül anélkül zajlott, hogy a központi hatalom - amely névlegesen harcolt hírdelési az eretnkség ellen, a királyok a felsőbb sörumokon igyekeztek olyan színben tündökölni, hogy ők a hittagadók üldözésének bajnokai - bármilyen erőfeszítést tett volna a lollardizmus visszaszorítására. Az 1400-as évek első évtizedében mindösszesen két eretneket égettek meg, leginkább csak a visszeszó, másodszor elfogott eretneket fogták perbe, s a legfőbb perbe fogott eretneknek pedig elegendő volt, ha megtayadta tves nézeteit. Mindez egészen az 1414-es, Sir John Oldcastle vezette lollard lázadásig tartott. Ennek leverése is sokkal inkább a király, V. Henrik nagypolitikai érdekének megfelelően zajlott, semmint egy megváltozott királyi politikát jelölt volna.*



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This chapter will explore the issue of religious tolerance and intolerance mainly during the reigns of Richard II (1377-99) and Henry IV (1399-1413) of England.

Up to the 1970s, the established tradition of English historiography had been to underrate the importance of Lollardy in high places throughout the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV. Due to the findings of Dr McFarlane, one of current English historiography's major arguments about Lollardy is that during the reign of Richard II it was tolerated by the state and at the court, largely in the early years of the reign, most probably by the man in charge of the government, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Several narrative sources underline that the heretics owed their popularity and success to the protection of powerful members of the nobility namely Lancaster himself.

Until the first months of Henry V's reign (1413-22) an influential group of Lollard knights continued to exist, and notwithstanding a number of anti-heretical measures, they enjoyed immunity, and were neither molested by the secular nor by the spiritual power. These prominent supporters of Wyclif were a fairly discrete and closely knit group of men, an intimate association under the patronage of King Richard. The nucleus of the Lollards were chamber knights and had been in royal household service for 20-30 years, being thus closely attached to the court for a long time. Almost all of them were career-soldiers, rising high through royal promotion on the battlefield. Sir Richard Stury, for instance, had connections with the Prince of Wales, having spent long periods campaigning in France with him.

Much of their affiliation to Wycliffite doctrines is absolutely clear either on the grounds of narrative or of documentary sources. Sir Richard Clanvowe, a household knight, was the first layman to write a homily, a pious treatise on the life of virtue (*The Two Ways*) with Lollard overtones, in English. Many of the wills of the household knights of Joan, Princess of Wales and her son, King Richard, display Lollard sentiments. The most powerful of this circle was Sir John Montagu, later earl of Salisbury, whose deep association with Lollardism was not at all held against him by the King.

I do not intend here to discuss the practice of royal patronage under King Richard II, that is, the way a group of regent-like advisors came to act on behalf of the king, who was of easily influenced character: this was not a matter simply of royal favourites but rather of a

careerist clique of 'guardians', a circle of very intimate associates who came to dominate the government – most of them installed in earldoms and high positions (*duketti*). There inevitably emerged a movement of discontent led by the traditional aristocracy (the 'Lords Appellant'). The movement against the 'evil advisors' succeeded: the principle *magistri* were executed by the Merciless Parliament in 1388. However, the system of patronage was rebuilt, and most of the close associates of Richard's early years gained ground again in the 1390s.

The Lollard-patron and heretic Montagu – also a celebrated poet at court – was able to stay in royal favour for nearly two decades, despite the nonconformity of his observances. He was one of the most influential men in the *Königsnähe*. He was granted the earldom of Salisbury in 1397, at a time when his association to the Lollards was a known fact. He was granted the lordship of Denbigh while the King was completely aware of his heretical connections and his protection towards the 'officially' persecuted Lollards.

Sir William Neville, a close associate of the Lollard chamber knights, was a member of a family that rose high in Richard's patronage: his brothers, Ralph Neville, elevated to the earldom of Westmoreland, and Alexander, installed in the archbishopric of York, were both the king's friends. Most intriguing is the relationship of the Archbishop of York with his Lollard brother: even though the king did not persecute him, it is extraordinary that the prelate Alexander also shut his eyes to his brother's openly advertised heretical commitment. Another member of Richard's associates, Sir William Beauchamp, in the high position of the captaincy of Calais, is also known to have owned a library of Lollard tracts and devotional pieces and he gave shelter to Oxford-educated Lollards in his estate of Kemerton, visited by Czech scholars looking for Latin copies of Wyclif's works in the early 1400s. He was the head of King Richard's chamber from 1378 to 1381. Another, Sir Lewis Clifford was appointed councillor in 1389 and retained his position until his death.

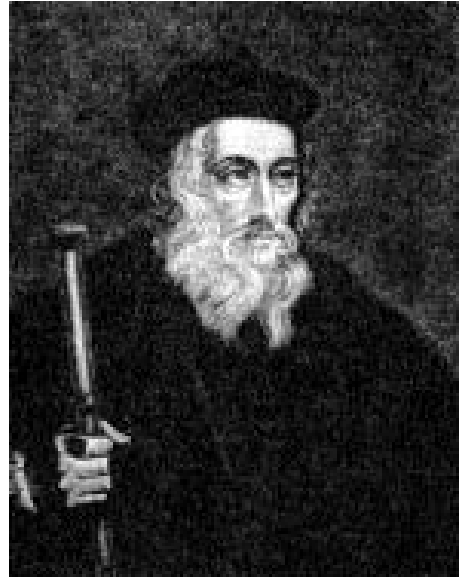
Most of these Lollards served in the innermost sanctum of the king's chamber and received large life annuities from the King. Sir Thomas Clifford was granted a total annuity of 500 marks per annum, equivalent to a small baronial landed income. Others were retained for life; some, like Stury, were very active councillors and formal/informal members of the Royal Council. Several of the knights were employed in foreign embassies. Sir John Cheyne, despite his affiliation to Lollardy, was elected Speaker in 1399, and despite the fact that he was denounced by the Archbishop of Canterbury as an established enemy of the church, was not tried at all, but rather seems to have been more active in diplomatic service under Henry IV than before 1399. Henry IV's patronage system operated regardless of religious observance. Besides, the knights were especially well rewarded with landed estates: e.g. Clanvowe was granted Haverford castle; Stury obtained the custody of Bamburg castle and was made keeper and surveyor of the lordship of Glamorgan; Clifford was charged with the custody of Cardigan castle. The presence of this body of knights already in the household of the Prince of Wales suggests that Richard may have grown to manhood in a radical religious atmosphere. The Black Prince and his wife Princess Joan held strongly anticlerical sympathies and had been touched by the anti-papal, moralising, mysticising, deeply personalizing sentiments of the day; thus he tolerated his knights' unorthodox ideas. The Prince presided over an assembly where Wyclif's anti-papal argu-

ments echoed. In 1378 Princess Joan sent a directive to the English bishops ordering them to halt their proceedings against Wyclif.

The sympathies of the Duke of Lancaster, who had the young king under his influence in governmental and also ecclesiastical matters, were very eclectic, but before 1381 he was an overt protector of John Wyclif and was well known for his anticlericalism and his tolerant attitude towards unorthodox religious opinions. As proved by the *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, he had warm relations with Wyclif's followers. In 1381 when Wyclif appealed to the king against the sentence of the chancellor of Oxford, Gaunt travelled there to defend him. A leading Wycliffite, Philip Repingdon claimed that Gaunt favoured his master's views. The Wycliffite Nicholas Hereford travelled to see Gaunt himself to ask for his intervention against the condemnation of Wyclif's theses in 1382. The patronage of the intransigent heretic hermit William Swin Derby showed Gaunt's commitment even more clearly. However, in the following years there was a shift in Lancaster's attitudes away from Lollardy. Although in the 1370s Wyclif became the favourite anticlerical spokesman of the whole government and his ideas were well suited to England's anti-papal diplomacy, it seems that Gaunt and other members of the court found justification in his pronouncements for their own anti-papal sentiments. Wyclif found employment and patronage in a wide spectrum of people in the highest political quarters. He was also a protégé of the King's mother, the Princess of Wales. Most of the noble and knightly strata, disillusioned with the papacy on political grounds and with the church on moral grounds, were susceptible to Wycliffism – but rather to a vague anticlerical sentiment than to the specific doctrines on the Eucharist, which might explain why they were tolerated in the 1390s and 1400s. In his later years the Duke of Lancaster vehemently rejected Wycliffite doctrines, which, nevertheless, did not keep him from launching assaults on clerical wealth and pretensions. He took Wyclif's strictures on the clergy as possessors of goods as a convenient political weapon. Nonetheless, even after Gaunt changed sides, the apostles of heresy continued to enjoy protection in high places. Lollardy remained enormously popular among the lesser nobility and the gentry: at the local level Lollard knights spread and defended Wycliffism. Even in the 1390s, when the court was overtly waging war against heresy, it could not make its policies felt at the local level.

Richard II, having grown up in a radical religious atmosphere, in the company of leading Lollard heretics – the three main personages among the Lollard chamber knights (Stury, Clanvowe and Clifford) were named executors of the Princess Mother's will – must have been sympathetic to these revolutionary issues. This might explain why the King, up to the 1390s, took no disciplinary action against the Lollard 'knights of the crown'. Richard was much more than merely lenient towards the prosecution of the Lollards; and he gave no assistance to the ecclesiastical arm in its fight against heresy. Some English historians argue that over and above the tolerant attitude in high circles Lollardy was actually a court-centred movement, with the King being deeply influenced by it at least in the 1380s. The church was left alone in its anti-heretical efforts; the Crown was silent.

Even the church was not unanimous in striving to exterminate heresy: there were several cases where leading clergymen, probably favourable to some of the Wycliffite theses, protected Lollards from prosecution. Not all of the clergymen, to say the least, and not at all the lay authorities were to be expected to act as partners in heretic-hunting, sharing the



**Fig. 1**  
John Wyclif.

uncompromising views of Archbishop Thomas Arundel of Canterbury. Some prelates were absolutely indifferent, some were submissive towards heretics, or towards those critical, anti-papal voices or evangelistic dreams that they themselves may have shared to some extent. A number of the clergy saw no cause for alarm, and it was not until Sir John Oldcastle's rebellion that they became alienated. The hermit William Swinderby was supported by the Leicester Austin canons of St. Mary's. Nicholas Hereford, having long been excommunicated for contumacy, was hiding in Nottingham, Leicester and Derbyshire, in the province of the Archbishop of York. Though he was arrested in Nottingham, through the intervention of the Lollard constable of Nottingham, Sir William Neville and his brother, Alexander Neville, Archbishop of York, he could freely move between Nottingham and Shenley, the manor of another Lollard, Montagu. Montagu was famous for his puritanical iconoclasm: he stripped the estate chapel of all Catholic insignia and cleared out all orthodox images – as well as harbouring Lollard preachers.

Before 1388 only one legislative initiative was taken against heresy. In 1382, largely as a response to the threat created by the Great Revolt, sheriffs were empowered to arrest unorthodox preachers. However, their new authority was very rarely put into practice and it was not until the Merciless Parliament of 1388 that anti-heretical policies were significantly tightened. The Crown's orientation can at least be discussed. The reason for the lenient and permissive policy toward Wycliffite ideas might be their strength amongst the administrative personnel. Members of the county organization, justices of peace, jurors etc. were greatly imbued with sympathies for anticlerical and moralistic ideas, a fact which undoubtedly played a critical role in the spread and endurance of heresy.

The Merciless Parliament ordered that Wycliffite writings be seized and that those who handled such material be imprisoned. The Lords Appellant aimed their complaints at the heretical knights of the Chamber and ardently criticized the king and his sympathies towards heretics as well as the failure of the state to fight vigorously enough against the

enemies of the faith. Again, it was not the Crown that introduced uncompromising measures, it was only compelled to do so by the Appellants; the severer anti-heretical measures were issued when the Appellants and Thomas Arundel, at that time bishop of Ely, had control of government. It was the king's council, ruled at that time by the Appellants, before which Lollard writings were to be examined; offenders were to be imprisoned at the king's pleasure, which, in the years following the crisis, meant according to the wishes of the Appellants' government.

The only Lollard courtier against whom action was taken personally by the Appellants was Sir Thomas Latimer, a former member of the Princess of Wales' entourage. There is no direct evidence about King Richard's personal religious observances; his sympathies for the Lollard theses must have been based on his father's mysticism and moral puritanism, rather than on more radical issues. It is difficult to make a distinction in a number of cases between the English exponents of the *devotio moderna* and the followers of anticlerical movements; or between a moralistic-spiritualistic-evangelistic idealism and reformist thinking, and an innate doctrinal and eucharistic Wycliffism. In addition, on ideological grounds Wyclif's ideas enhanced and enlarged royal authority over the clergy; thus they encountered the sympathies of the Duke of Lancaster and perhaps of Richard himself, especially during the period of his 'tyranny'. Richard was even admired by 16th-century Protestant historians as an innocent youth "seduced by the ... bloodthirsty popish prelates". John Foxe for instance tried to claim that Richard was a would-be supporter of Wyclif and the Lollards, or at least that he was "no great disfavourer of the way and doctrine of Wickliff". In this view, the bishops' desire for blood, contrasted with royal lenity, was responsible for the anti-heretical statutes. This is legend – a tolerant, Lollard-supporting young prince that the cruel Lancastrians failed to follow – which is far from reality, but it is true that Richard himself was not of a fierce disposition towards the heretics, at least in the 1380s. Richard was not by nature a blood-letter, he was not ill-disposed toward some of the Wycliffite ideas which the Church wanted to exterminate ruthlessly. It is possible that he was not convinced that these unorthodox ideas were seditious or heretical or that they constituted a threat to the state and society.

However, a change in Richard's attitude can be observed at the end of the 1380s, when he became a vigorous and articulate defender of orthodoxy and, as did his uncle, John of Gaunt, he seemed to abandon his interest in the Wycliffites. Nevertheless, though it might be suggested that this concern ebbed away once a connection between Lollardy and social unrest appeared to be a frightening possibility and the Crown was alarmed about the unsettling effects of Lollard preaching, it is also true that most of King Richard's Lollard favourites continued to be retained, keeping their positions and influence at court (Sir Robert Whitney remained harbinger of the household, even though it must have come to the king's knowledge that he lent support to the humble Lollard missionary William Swinderby). Also in the 1390s there were a great number of minor officials in the government who were suspected of Lollard sympathies, though only few were tried. Thus, we might assume that the change of attitude did not touch the relationship of Richard with the Lollard knights and even though the king was orthodox and conservative in public, at least towards the outside world, religious matters did not affect his system of patronage. On the grounds of Richard's letters it seems that he turned totally against heresy in the 1390s:

he called for combating Lollardy, the maintenance of the orthodox faith and the destruction of damnable opinions. In one letter he urged the bishops to arrest all the Lollards and other heretics, speaking with contempt of their 'damnable errors repugnant to the Faith'. No matter how intolerant his attitude towards the Lollards, the king continued to be tolerant towards the leading Lollard knights, all of whom retained their wealth and position at the court (e.g. Sir Richard Stury remained royal councillor up to his death in 1395; and Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvowe regularly attended council sessions in the 1390s). As a zealous defender of the Catholic faith, the king more vigorously deployed the secular arm against heresy in the 1390s. The University of Oxford was required to expel all those who were found to be of heretical sympathies. Although Richard was vigilant against heresy, when his friend Sir Richard Stury was openly charged with heresy, he was satisfied when Stury had sworn an oath to abjure. Stury, however, could keep on using his influence at court to protect heretics from prosecution and provide a shelter for them in his home estates.

Even when the King and the court deliberately took radical action against heretics, great quantities of vernacular Lollard writings, folk catechisms and theological handbooks which spread seditious ideas continued to be published in a network of organized scriptoria, under the protection of municipal councils or administrative officials. Until 1401 the Oxford dons freely discussed translating the Bible, and vernacular versions were distributed without any restraint. Oldcastle, the riot-leading Lollard, had established a scribes' office at least a decade before he was arrested, and one might wonder how he had been able to go on producing anticlerical writings for years after the *De heretico comburendo* statute of 1401 was promulgated, without any authority knowing about it. This is hardly imaginable after the radical declaration of Henry IV against heresy when he ascended the throne in 1399. One is forced to ask how Oldcastle could have organized a secret network of heretical societies throughout the country without the government, busily searching for anti-Lancastrian *coups-d'état*, being aware of it.

In the 1410s too there was a well-organized underground of safe-houses and manors for heretics, like that of Sir Thomas Latimer in Northamptonshire. In 1388-89 Latimer, using his rights as the lord of a small market town, protected a famous Lollard preacher, John Wodard of Knebworth, preventing the bishop of Lincoln from citing him to appear before the court of the church. Latimer as landlord not only refused to hand the heretic over to the bishop but also let him preach to the assemblage on market-days. When seven citations from the church failed to produce any effect, the bishop invoked the lay power. The king ordered the sheriff to arrest the preacher. We do not know the end of the story, but we suggest that Wodard may not have been sentenced and probably escaped under Latimer's protection, without the royal power showing any serious intention of interfering. Even more astonishing, when seen alongside the king's outward attitude against heresy and commitment to orthodoxy, is the continued existence of heresy at Latimer's manor of Braybrooke, even after Richard's reign had ended, throughout the first quarter of the 15th century.

The story reveals how little Lollard knights had to fear. Latimer's responsibility was never taken into account by the court. He felt so secure that he did not hesitate to bring an action against the bishop's summoner, but the Crown did not interfere. Latimer enjoyed complete immunity. Even though he was summoned to the council to be examined for his

possession of Lollard books, he formally submitted and promised to abjure his heretical concepts. But in vain: a year later he was brave enough to fight the bishop of Lincoln. Latimer was able to retain his Lollard church, served by a notorious Lollard rector, Robert Hook. Braybrooke remained a centre of Lollardy during the reign of Henry IV too: the secular power did little to molest the rector. It was only in 1414 he was charged with heresy. He formally abjured his false opinions, but even though he was charged again in 1425 with having continued the practices he had abjured, he was unbelievably lucky to escape with the penalty of reading a recantation. The notorious Lollard preacher John Purvey was not disturbed and spent some twenty years from the early 1380s on spreading his master's doctrines – although he recanted in 1401 – and was even offered a benefice.

There were towns where pious burgesses offered tacit security for Lollards (e.g. Leicester and Northampton), and all this could not have happened without the court knowing something about it. When royal favourites or associates was found to be of Lollard sympathies, the king was content if they formally submitted and renounced their heretical beliefs. We do not know the king's role in the parliament of 1397 when a petition was submitted by the clergy asking for heresy to be made a capital offence and sentenced in all cases with capital punishment, but it did not pass. The king postponed the decision.

Although measures were taken at Oxford as early as in 1382 and then in 1395 and 1407 to extinguish and suppress Wyclif's writings, enough still survived three years later to make a bonfire. Thus, the efficiency and steadfastness of royal government in persecuting Wycliffism must be questioned. The survival of heretical writings on so large a scale and for such a long time might have been due to compliant and tolerant administrative personnel. About three hundred Wycliffite sermons survive up to the present day, and even in the second half of the 15th century the heresiarch's teachings were widely circulated.

The announcement of Henry IV's anti-heretical policies and the passing of the *De heretico comburendo* for the burning of heretics, however, did not mean that a vigorous war had started against the enemies of the Faith. Henry promised the convocation of 1399 "to destroy heresies, errors and heretics as far as he could", and to fight "certain evil disposed preachers, holding diverse ... detestable ... opinions repugnant to the canonical decisions of the Holy Mother Church". A few months later he issued a mandate that no chaplains, except parochial ones in their own parish churches were to preach without episcopal licence. One might feel, however, that Henry's program of making reprisal against heretics was primarily caused by his political concerns and lasted only until he was able to stabilize his hold on the throne. In contrast to his declared enthusiasm for extirpating heresy, Henry was reluctant to effect retaliation in practice: only two Lollards, William Sawtry and John Badby, were burned. There was a change, nevertheless, respect to the 1380s-90s, when only recidivous and obstinate heretics were sentenced, usually to imprisonment and forfeiture, though the change was slighter than one would have expected on the grounds of the king's declarations, which in this light seem most pragmatic. Badby's and Sawtry's public execution, well-organized on the vast open place at Smithfield, was solely set up as a showcase. Theoretically England adopted the death penalty by fire at the stake, but it did little in practice to expunge heresy from the land, since execution was not strict: it was used only against those convicted heretics who refused to recant or who were caught twice. Many were simply 'forgotten' after they had been caught the first time, even by local clergymen.

Many simply abjured since Lollards had a contempt for oaths in general, and it was acceptable for them to recant *formally*. It doubtful that many of the recantations were at all genuine. Nevertheless, while this was well-known to the government, no severer measures taken: thus, a great number of heretics were able to escape capital punishment and simply go on preaching. The clergy had no administrative means to detect and capture heretics. The simplest way to escape capture was to go to a neighbouring diocese. This was also pretty well known in government circles, yet no action was taken to remedy the situation. Those who preached without licence or spread unorthodox ideas were supposed to be purged by the church and abjure; however, if captured by the sheriff, after paying a fine to the King, they were free to leave, even before the canonical trial had begun. The flight from the diocese was ignored at court. The king was only interested in Lollardy as far as he could benefit from being able to have his political enemies stigmatised by it. Some historians argue that it was only because he needed legitimacy, manpower and money, being unsteady on the throne, that Henry conceded capital punishment. The statute was something other than the altruistic response of a dutiful Christian king.

Even after the outburst of anti-heretical feelings in 1401, Lollard teachings were widely preached and discussed. In the 1420s missionaries like William White or William of Thaxted were left more or less undisturbed to spread Lollardy in the countryside. Several of the centres and territories deeply infected with religious dissent (e.g. Leicestershire, Derbyshire; Reading and Coventry) survived all persecutions until the Reformation. No Lollard community, with the exception of, perhaps, Oxford, was extinguished completely by the rigour of the law. One might argue whether the repressive measures taken were vigorous enough, or the whether the kings' determination to expel Lollardy was firm.

Even leading Lollards like Sir John Cheyne were employed throughout the reign of Henry IV. Sir John's diplomatic skills were much more appreciated than his old commitment to heresy condemned. He was deployed in a number of embassies in the 1400s and indeed it was not until 1431 that he was condemned as a heretic and finally executed, despite the fact that during the Oldcastle rebellion he had harboured the Lollard preacher Thomas Drayton. Philip Repingdon, himself a devoted Lollard and follower of Wyclif, having abjured Lollardy in 1382, was able to become an abbot in Leicester and then Bishop of Lincoln from 1405 to 1420. There is no evidence that he was a harsh persecutor of Lollards, rather we are told of his gentleness. He granted permission to all theologians of Oxford to preach anywhere within his jurisdiction in Lincoln, regardless of any affiliation with Wycliffism. On top of all that, his will is full of Lollard sentiments! There were Lollards amongst Henry IV's and Henry V's servants: the Archbishop of Canterbury also complained that Lancastrian courtiers turned their backs on the sacraments!

During Henry IV's reign there was only one other statute dealing with Lollardy; it was introduced in 1406 by the Prince of Wales, more perseverent in hunting heretics. It proposed that Lollards be arrested and tried in the next parliament, not in the diocesan canonical courts. The King, rather astonishingly, decreed that the bill be enforced only until the next parliament. The measure was short-lived since a few months later it was not renewed. It took three years, for instance, for the articles issued by Archbishop Arundel at Oxford in 1407, restricting teaching at the university and limiting those who could teach doctrine, to gain the King's support, and for those who maintained false doctrines to be arrested with

the help of the Crown. The King's compromising and submissive action here justifies a tolerant attitude towards Lollards had a considerable background support also at the court and in parliament in the 1400s, too. The archbishop himself asserted that there was a strong party of parliamentary knights who, if not all Lollards, were fiercely hostile to the church. In fact, they disapproved of the bishops' rigid interpretation of their duty to suppress heresy. Moreover, Henry had to struggle with the Commons all through his reign. As a matter of fact, the disendowment of certain ecclesiastical properties (e.g. alien priories) was understandably popular amongst the gentry, and the King needed the Commons' support to obtain a vote favourable to the royal seizure of the church's temporalities for a year in 1404. Even the chronicler noted that Wyclif's preaching was "pleasing to the powerful and the rich, namely the withholding of tithes and ... the removal of temporalities from the clergy". Some church lands had already been seized by the Crown and even notorious Lollards like Sir John Cheyne could acquire extensive landed properties from the 'alien priories'. This cooperation between MPs and the Crown resulted in the King's lenient behaviour to heresy. On the grounds of the 1401 statute a great number of gentlemen and squires could have been legally sentenced to death. In 1404 at the Worcester council, the King being short of supplies, some knights and squires whose Lollard sympathies were apparent – and yet were employed by the Crown for the Welsh campaign – suggested that they should take the prelates' horses and money and send them home on foot. A most intriguing example of the gentry's anticlerical and subversive ideas was aired at the parliament of 1410. In the light of anti-heretical measures it seems astonishing that it was in any way possible to obtain such a petition in parliament. A group of knights, clearly Lollards or at least enthusiastic sympathizers, outlined a plan for confiscating the bishops' lands in order to provide the king with a large extra sum for defence costs. It had no chance of success, but it is strange that according to some sources the King prevaricated and deferred his decision for a moment.

Despite the policy of repression expounded in high places, Lollardy still had substantial support in the country up until the suppression of Oldcastle's rising. Henry V's ascension, however, did bring about a real change in the Crown's attitude. The new king presented himself as a keen defender of the faith. When Oldcastle's heresy was revealed, the king had to face the fact that one of his friends, a most intimate member of his household, was leading a double life. Oldcastle was not a humble gentleman: as Lord Cobham he held substantial landed estates. He was Henry's companion-in-arms. The presence of a heretic in the princely retinue for more than a decade raises questions about the Prince's own attitude towards religious unorthodoxy. Henry V may well have shared some of the antagonism to the clergy which was felt by many of the knights who served under him. How could the Prince, known to have lived with his soldiers, not have learned anything about his closest associate's unorthodox ideas? The King might have had some knowledge of the matter since he insisted that an innocent explanation for Oldcastle's connection to Lollards was possible. Some sources state that his Lollard opinions were well-known before, and he was publicly regarded as the acknowledged leader of Lollardy in the early 15th century. It was a known fact that Oldcastle's castle at Cooling was a refuge for heretics. Even after Oldcastle was condemned for heresy, Henry was still reluctant to disown him and ordered, rather surprisingly, that 40 days should elapse before death penalty be exacted. Before the 40th day, the prisoner mysteriously escaped from the Tower. The revolt was suppressed, but

Oldcastle eluded capture, and, unbelievably, a pardon was issued for him, which he spurned. In the end, he was executed after retrial in 1417.

It is not true that from 1414 public executions started on a large scale, or that crowds of heretics were burnt. Of the 70 who were tried only 45 were promptly executed, and only seven were burnt as heretics, the others being found guilty of treason. Those who were condemned and sentenced to death, but not executed, were only detained for a year, then they were handed over to the bishops to be purged of heresy. A good number of the participants in the rebellion were able to leave freely after a few years' time. The rising was shocking and alarming for the Crown, but a certain level of tolerance was still observed. The statute of Leicester in 1414 is a milestone not in the sense that heresy started to be suppressed persistently, but in the sense that the Crown became aware that it could gain prestige and political capital if it were to assume the role of the defender of the Faith. This was a turning point from the point of view of the King's pragmatic political concerns, rather than with regard to ecclesiastical or theological issues. Henry was the ruler elected by God to suppress the enemies of the Church. He was directed by God's hand to erase heresies and fortify Christian faith. No wonder the Lollards dubbed him the prince of priests (*princeps presbiterorum*). Henry V was a master of royal propaganda, whose machinery was working very well and by the mid-1420s there was no doubt that Lollardy was on a par with treason and felony. Lollards were considered equivalent to seditious traitors: Henry V was able to make the public believe that heresy was a threat to the whole society and that all Lollards wished to kill the prelates. This picture is best preserved in the extraordinarily biased histories written by Protestant preachers in the 16th century, where Lancastrians are depicted as bloodthirsty mass murderers, enjoying tortures and "shedding Christian blood at their pleasure".

Lollardy did not bring the Inquisition to England. Even notorious Lollards were able to survive the whole of Henry V's reign. Clearly, Lollardy was not dead, even though convocation was busy hearing heresy cases after 1414, a wide network of cells, schools and secret activists survived well into the 1430s and 1440s. However, Henry V's reign marks the beginning of a new age: the treatment of heretics became a political question. Lollardy was to be subordinated to the King's diplomatic schemes, to Henry's search for European grandeur. There were choices to be made: if Henry had decided not to punish his friend, Oldcastle, he could not have stepped forward with the capital of being one of the most ardent defenders of Catholicism and could not have played a decisive role at the Council of Constance as a legitimate member of the European power system and maker of an 'imperial' policy. This might be the reason why Oldcastle's condemnation started just after King Henry negotiated with Sigismund, King of the Romans, and agreed on co-operation in ecclesiastical matters at the Council that opened that year (1414). As Henry showed himself steadfast in his new policy against heresy, Sigismund could have found in him a new ally in his efforts to unify the church. Both rulers were dreaming of the diminution of French influence over the Church and in Europe. Sigismund's future hope meant a restoration of Imperial supremacy in Christendom – a new front in the European power system leaving the French out and creating an axis between Sigismund and Henry V, the newly found *athleta Christi*, the champion of the crusade against heresy. In the summer of 1414 proposals for an alliance were brought from Sigismund to Henry. As the Lollards were sup-

pressed in an exemplary way, Sigismund, having been informed of Oldcastle's revolt and Henry's uncompromising steadfastness, applied for England's assistance in achieving the unity of the church. Now England grew up to become an equal member on the European political scene.



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## SOURCES

1. The knights of parliament petition for the disendowment of the clergy, 1410. C. L. Kingsford, *The Chronicles of London*, London 1905, from British Museum, Cottonian MS., Julius B II.

[...] the Commons presented a bill to the king about the temporalities being in the hands of the religious, of which the tenor follows: – [...] the king may have of the temporalities occu-

plied by bishops, abbots, and priors, and wasted extravagantly, within the realm 15 earls and 1,500 knights, 6,200 squires and 100 almshouses [...] well maintained [...] by lands and tenements. [...] the king may have every year a clear gain to his treasury for the defence of his realm £ 20,000 and more [...].

And yet furthermore may be gained £ 100,000 of temporalities wasted and occupied among worldly clerks, and found herewith 1,500 priests and clerks, every clerk being paid yearly 40s. And 6,200 squires in the manner before said....

2. The recantation of John Skilly of Flixton, miller, in the court of the bishop of Norwich, 1429. MS. B. 2 of the Archbishop of Westminster, 220-5.

In the name of God [...] I John Skilly of Flixton [...] defamed and noted hugely of heresy, feeling and understanding that before this time I affirmed open errors and heresies, holding [...] and teaching that the sacraments of baptism done in water and of confirmation done by a bishop in accustomed form in Holy Church be but of little avail [...]. I also held that confession should be made unto no priest but only to God, for no priest has power to absolve a man from sin. Also that I held that no priest has power to make Christ's body in the form of bread in the sacrament of the altar, and after the sacramental words said by a priest at mass there remains pure material bread on the altar. [...] Also that I held that every true man and woman living in charity is a priest and that no priest has more power in the administration of the sacraments than an unlearned man has. [...] Also that I held that the Pope of Rome is Anti-Christ, and bishops or other prelates are disciples of Anti-Christ. [...] Also that I held it is lawful for all men to withdraw and take away tithes and offerings from churches and priests. [...] Wherefore I willingly follow and serve the doctrine of Holy Church [...]. I confess detest and despise my said errors and heresies and the said opinions I confess to be heretical and erroneous, and repugnant to the faith. [...] From henceforth I shall never hold error nor heresies [...], nor shall I defend any man holding or teaching such manner of things. [...] If I know any heretics or any men and women suspected of heresy or favourers, comforters [...] of them, or, of any men or women making privy conspiracies or assemblies, I shall let you, worshipful father, have early and ready knowledge [...].

3. The will of Sir John Cheyne. Register of Archbishop Arundel, Canterbury, ii, fo. 203<sup>v</sup>.

I John Cheyne false traitor to my lord God [...] make and ordain my testament and my last will: at the beginning I most unworthy and God's traitor recommend me, wretched and sinful wholly to the grace and to the great mercy of the blissful Trinity. [...] my wretched stinking carrion to be buried without the chapel new made within the churchyard of Beckford [...] I pray and charge my surveyors as they will answer before God and as all mine whole trust in this manner is in them that on my stinking carrion be neither laid cloth of gold ne of silk but russet cloth price the yard fifteen pence; and one taper at mine head and one other at my feet [...] Do my executors all things which owe duty to be done in such case without any more cost save alms



**SEE PLATES 8-12**



to poor men [...].

