

Burning Bodies in Tudor Times

In Tudor times, religion was a matter of life and death. Martin Bucer was a celebrated Protestant theologian. While the Protestant boy-king Edward VI ruled England, Martin Bucer became Professor of Theology at Cambridge. When Martin died, 3,000 people crammed into Great St Mary's for his funeral – so many that the benches had to be repaired.

Just six years later, the Catholic Queen Mary was on the throne and Martin Bucer's Protestant ideas made him a target for royal revenge. Mary burned many Protestants alive, but Bucer was already dead. This didn't stop her. Martin Bucer's body was dug up from his grave in Great St Mary's, chained to a stake in the market square and burned, along with a pile of books. Some people mocked the university authorities for binding the 'rotten carcases' with chains, saying that 'they might be burnt loose without peril, for it was not to be feared that they would run away.' Later, Mary's Protestant half-sister Elizabeth I ordered the ashes from the bonfire to be reburied in Great St Mary's again, so Martin Bucer is still remembered here today.

