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| http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/marvell/invisiline.gif | |  | | --- | | Portrait of John Foxe  Life of John Foxe (1516-1587)  **JOHN FOXE**, the author of the famous *Book of Martyrs*, was born at Boston, in Lincolnshire, in 1516. At the age of sixteen he is said to have entered Brasenose College, Oxford, where he was the pupil of John Harding or Hawarden, and had for room-mate Alexander Nowell, afterwards dean of St. Paul's. His authenticated connexion at the university is, however, with Magdalen College. He took his B.A. degree in 1 537 and his M.A. in 1543. He was lecturer on logic in 1540-1541. He wrote several Latin plays on Scriptural subjects, of which the best, *De Christo triumphante*, was repeatedly printed, (London, 1551; Basel, 1556, &c.), and was translated into English by Richard Day, son of the printer.  He became a fellow of Magdalen College in 1539, resigning in 1545. It is said that he refused to conform to the rules for regular attendance at chapel, and that he protested both against the enforced celibacy of fellows and the obligation to take holy orders within seven years of their election. The customary statement that he was expelled from his fellowship is based on the untrustworthy biography attributed to his son Samuel Foxe, but the college records state that he resigned of his own accord and *ex honesta causa*. The letter in which he protests to President Oglethorpe against the charges of irreverence, &c., brought against him is printed in Pratt's edition (vol. i. Appendix, pp. 58-61).  On leaving Oxford he acted as tutor for a short time in the house of the Lucys of Charlecote, near Stratford-on-Avon, where he married Agnes Randall. Late in 1547 or early in the next year he went to London. He found a patron in Mary Fitzroy, Duchess of Richmond, and having been ordained deacon by [Ridley](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/ridley.htm) in 1550, he settled at Reigate Castle, where he acted as tutor to the duchess's nephews, the orphan children of [Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey](http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/henry.htm). On the accession of [Queen Mary](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/queenmary.htm), Foxe was deprived of his tutorship by the boys' grandfather, the [Duke of Norfolk](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/thomashoward2.htm), who was now released from prison.  He retired to Strassburg, and occupied himself with a Latin history of the Christian persecutions which he had begun at the suggestion of [Lady Jane Grey](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/ladyjanegrey.htm). He had assistance from two clerics of widely differing opinions — from Edmund Grindal, who was later, as Archbishop of Canterbury, to maintain his Puritan convictions in opposition to [Elizabeth](http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm); and from [John Aylmer](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/aylmer.htm), afterwards one of the bitterest opponents of the Puritan party. This book, dealing chiefly with Wycliffe and Huss, and coming down to 1500, formed the first outline of the *Actes and Monuments*. It was printed by Wendelin Richelius with the title of *Commentarii rerum in ecclesia gestarum* (Strasburg, 1554). In the year of its publication Foxe removed to Frankfort, where he found the English colony of Protestant refugees divided into two camps. He made a vain attempt to frame a compromise which should be accepted by the extreme Calvinists and by the partisans of the Anglican doctrine.  He removed (1555) to Basel, where he worked as printer's reader to Johann Herbst or Oporinus. He made steady progress with his great book as he received reports from England of the religious persecutions there, and he issued from the press of Oporinus his pamphlet *Ad inclytos ac praepotentes Angliae proceres ... supplicatio* (1557), a plea for toleration addressed to the English nobility. In 1559 he completed the Latin edition' of his martyrology and returned to England. He lived for some time at Aldgate, London, in the house of his former pupil, Thomas Howard, now duke of Norfolk, who retained a sincere regard for his tutor and left him a small pension in his will. He became associated with John Day the printer, himself once a Protestant exile. Foxe was ordained priest by Edmund Grindal, bishop of London, in 1560, and besides much literary work he occasionally preached at Paul's Cross and other places. His work had rendered great service to the government, and he might have had high preferment in the Church but for the Puritan views which he consistently maintained. He held, however, the prebend of Shipton in Salisbury cathedral, and is said to have been for a short time rector of Cripplegate.  In 1563 was issued from the press of John Day the first English edition of the *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perillous Dayes, touching matters of the Church, wherein are comprehended and described the great Persecution and horrible Troubles that have been wrought and practised by the Romishe Prelates, speciallye in this Realme of England and Scotland, from the yeare of our Lorde a thousande to the time now present. Gathered and collected according to the true Copies and Wrytinges certificatorie as well of the Parties themselves that Suffered, as also out of the Bishop's Registers, which were the Doers thereof, by John Foxe, commonly known as the Book of Martyrs*. Several gross errors which had appeared in the Latin version, and had been since exposed, were corrected in this edition.  Its popularity was immense and signal. The Marian persecution was still fresh in men's minds, and the graphic narrative intensified in its numerous readers the fierce hatred of Spain and of the Inquisition which was one of the master passions of the reign. Nor was its influence transient. For generations the popular conception of Roman Catholicism was derived from its bitter pages. Its accuracy was immediately attacked by Catholic writers, notably in the *Dialogi sex* (1566), nominally from the pen of Alan Cope, but in reality by Nicholas Harpsfield, and by Robert Parsons in *Three Conversions of England* (1570).  These criticisms induced Foxe to produce a second corrected edition, *Ecclesiastical History, contayning the Actes and Monuments of things passed in every kynges tyme*... in 1570, a copy of which was ordered by Convocation to be placed in every collegiate church. Foxe based his accounts of the martyrs partly on authentic documents and reports of the trials, and on statements received direct from the friends of the sufferers, but he was too hasty a worker and too violent a partisan to produce anything like a correct or impartial account of the mass of facts with which he had to deal. Anthony a Wood says that Foxe "believed and reported all that was told him, and there is every reason to suppose that he was purposely misled, and continually deceived by those whose interest it was to bring discredit on his work," but he admits that the book is a monument of his industry, his laborious research and his sincere piety.  The gross blunders due to carelessness have often been exposed, and there is no doubt that Foxe was only too ready to believe evil of the Catholics, and he cannot always be exonerated from the charge of wilful falsification of evidence. It should, however, be remembered in his honour that his advocacy of religious toleration was far in advance of his day. He pleaded for the despised Dutch Anabaptists, and remonstrated with [John Knox](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/knox.htm) on the rancour of his *First Blast of the Trumpet*. Foxe was one of the earliest students of Anglo-Saxon, and he and Day published an edition of the Saxon gospels under the patronage of [Archbishop Parker](http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/matthewparker.htm). He died on the 18th of April 1587 and was buried at St Giles's, Cripplegate. |   Excerpted from:  Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th Ed. Vol X.  Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910. 771. |