

## Doctor of Divinity William A. Whitaker (from the Brenda Whitaker Reed Family Tree)



Dr. William A. Whitaker was Master of St. John's College, Cambridge University. He was a country boy, born at The Holme in 1547. Under the Law of Primogeniture, the estate was to pass to his oldest brother, and he as third son, was sent off to get an education and enter the church. He advanced in life through the preferment and influence of his Nowell uncles and other powerful men. After attending the common school in Burnley, England, William was taken to London, where his uncle Alexander Nowell, Doctor of Divinity, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, enrolled him in the church's "prep school." At age 16, William matriculated in Michaelmas Term, 4 Oct 1564, at Trinity College, Cambridge, England.

William was regarded as an authority in both Latin and Greek. He took his B.A. in 1567-8, was made a Fellow of Trinity in 1569, and took his B.D. at Trinity in 1578. He was ordained priest and deacon at Lincoln, 21 Dec 1576; was appointed University Preacher in 1577; and invested with the Prebendary of Norwich in 1578, in which year he was also "incorporated" at Oxford University. In 1580, through the influence of the Nowells and Lord Burleigh, Queen Elizabeth appointed William A. Whitaker "Regius Professor of Divinity" at Cambridge University. At the time, there were only three Regius Professors in all of England, and only one in Divinity. Shortly afterwards, the Queen also made William A. Whitaker Chancellor of St. Paul's Cathedral, 1580-1587. In 1587, also, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity. In 1586, Queen Elizabeth appointed him Master of St. John's College, Cambridge, over the protests of some of the Fellows who objected to William's Calvinistic Puritanism. William had gained his position through influence and patronage, but his administration was based wholly upon merit, scholarship, and ability. His judgements were soon regarded as fair, just, and impartial, which soon made him one of the most loved of Masters. In his "History of the College of St. John the Evangelist, Cambridge" (1869), Thomas Baker is almost unbounded in his praise for William Whitaker as one of the greatest Masters of all time. William held the post for eight years, until his death in 1595. William published several major works of theology in his lifetime and left several others in manuscript. His works are all extremely Puritan in argument and tone, he being an ardent follower of Calvin and Deza. Still, he came to be respected as the foremost theologian in the time of Queen Elizabeth. In 1573, 1574, 1578, and again in 1673, he published Greek translations of Latin verses by his uncle, Alexander Nowell. These translations were widely regarded for their grace and beauty. In 1581, he published a bilingual (Latin and Greek) "Ten Answers to Edmund Campion, the Jesuit." An English translation (with the Latin on facing pages) was published in London in 1606, by Richard Stock. In 1582, William published "The Pope of Rome is the Antichrist." Over the years, he published learned disputes over scriptures with John Durei, the Scottish Jesuit (1583), Robert Bellarmine (1588), and Thomas Stapleton (1588). In all these arguments, William was said to have stated the opposition's position fairly, with clarity, and then offered his counterarguments with such logic and force, that even his opponents respected his abilities and arguments. Some of his opponents are said to have hung his portrait on their walls as a gesture of admiration and honor. In November and December of 1595, he was working with others in London on the so-called Lambeth Articles. In inclement weather, he caught a cold, which worsened, and he died

4 Dec 1595. He was buried under a modest monument in Old Chapel, St. Johns College, Cambridge. This Old Chapel was demolished before 1869, and now all that remains are a few stones marking the foundation. A memorial tablet to William Whitaker was installed in the center of the anteroom of the New Chapel. The epitaph reads, "Here lies Dr. Whitaker, formerly Regius Professor Divinity, a man gifted with eloquence, judgement, clarity of mind, memory, industry and sanctity. But his humility, rarest of virtues, outshone all of these. He was Master of this College for more than eight years, farsighted, defending the right and punishing wickedness." A biography of him was written by Rev. Edward C. Brookes, B.D., M.A., Somerleyton Rectory, Suffolk, entitled "Dialogue and Syllogism in the Sixteenth Century, a Study in the Life and Theology of William Whitaker (ob. 1595), Master of St. John's, 1587-1595, Regius Prof of Divinity, 1580-1595," (unpublished thesis, 1971, University of Leeds). The Archives of St. John's College has a typescript copy. There are two portraits of William A. Whitaker in the Master's quarters at St. John's, one in the master's office, one in the guest bedroom.