

The Lady Chapel Mount Grace



A History by Fr Anthony Storey

abridged by Fr Neil McNicholas
for the “Friends of the Lady Chapel”

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Anthony Storey (M.A., S.T.L., B.D.)



Anthony Storey was born in 1919 and grew up on the Yorkshire Wolds. After schooling at Stonyhurst and the English College in Rome, he was ordained in 1943 and studied medieval history at Cambridge before beginning his priestly ministry.

After appointments in Middlesbrough and Saltburn, he then moved to St Charles' parish in Hull before becoming Chaplain to the university there. A spell in North Yorkshire at Stokesley, Brough Park and Bedale, was followed by sixteen years as pastor in Cottingham.

He always loved teaching, and his free time was spent walking and keeping a tree nursery. Fr Tony retired to Hull in 1996 and died in 2007.

PREFACE

The original, and slightly longer, version of this text, *Mount Grace Lady Chapel – An Historical Enquiry* by Fr Anthony J Storey, was published by Highgate Publications of Beverley in 2001. It was typical of Fr Tony that he had written a very scholarly work which presented a comprehensive history of the Lady Chapel. In his own preface to that work he said:

My interest dates from before the purchase of the ruin in 1952, and I was seldom more than an observer of what was to follow. After the chapel was restored in 1961, Bishop Gordon Wheeler asked H. Martin Gillett, who had written extensively on ancient shrines, to unravel the chapel's history. His work was still unfinished when he died, and I inherited many of his letters and papers, but it was only after my own retirement that I was able to work on his material, not all of which has come to light. This story, then, owes much to him, but is also an invitation to further research which may fill out the story and perhaps find a solution to some of the riddles still outstanding. I owe a special debt to Kenneth Croft Andrew, County Archivist of North Yorkshire, with whom I had many discussions; to Fathers Columba Cary-Elwes, and Hugh Aveling of Ampleforth; to Katharine Longley, Margaret Clitherow's biographer; to Sister Gregory and the sisters of the Bar Convent; to the Abbey of Buckfast for access to some of Martin Gillett's papers; and especially to Judith Smeaton, Deputy County Archivist, North Yorkshire County Record Office, Northallerton, who saved me from many blunders.

Fr Tony's introductory chapter reads:

In June 1942, at a time of air-raids and rationing, two young priests, Fathers Peter Storey and Michael O'Sullivan set off to explore the ruins of Mount Grace Priory. Browsing over the map they spotted the heading 'Lady Chapel (ruin)'. 'We scrambled up through woods, over walls and hedges' Fr Peter said, 'and there was the ruin and the cottage. The cottage was locked, and the chapel, whose walls were mostly about waist high, had become a little kitchen garden with gooseberries growing in it. And so was re-born interest in the Lady Chapel of Mount Grace, Osmotherley.'

They learned later of a tradition of pilgrims, not in any great numbers, but continuously over centuries, visiting the ruined chapel, especially around the traditional feast of Our Lady's Birthday – Little Lady Day, as it used to be called – 8 September. Local tradition had it that there had been secret burials at the chapel, and there was even talk about

the possibility of Margaret Clitherow being buried there, since her friends had taken her body a long journey from the dump in York where it had been concealed after her execution on Lady Day, 1586. Family connections, and the secret use of the Drover's Road across the top of the Hambleton Hills, would certainly have made this feasible.

No one seemed to know the history, but interest was growing. And camping up there shortly after the end of the war with a group of scouts, the Marist fathers celebrated Mass, probably for the first time since the Dissolution, among the bushes in the old ruined chapel.

In 1952 Sir Hugh Bell, faced with heavy death duties, had to consider the future of the Ingleby estate. A suggestion was made that the Carthusian Monks might return to Mount Grace and restore the whole priory, but the projected cost of reconstruction, as well as the lack of sufficient monks to man the restored priory, led to the plan being abandoned. However, aware of the new interest in the chapel ruins on the mount, through Marie Moore who was managing the Estate Office, Sir Hugh made an informal offer for a quick sale of the cottage, the ruin and Chapel Wood. Immediately Ralph Scrope, of the Friarage, Yarm, who was land agent to the Earl and Countess of Eldon, whose estates were in County Durham, was approached and together they made the purchase. It had been the revered Archbishop Scrope of York who had endowed some of the cells at Mount Grace at its foundation and the family connection had continued until the Dissolution.

It was proposed that, after exploration of the floor and foundation of the chapel, it should be rebuilt and restored to use. The Scrope and Eldon families undertook this task at their own expense, and later proposed to make of the chapel a memorial to both families. Meanwhile in 1953, in lieu of death duties, the rest of the Priory ruins became the property of the National Trust.

When I was asked to prepare a history to mark the 2016 launch of the 'Friends of the Lady Chapel', itself a suggestion of the Scrope and Eldon families, it was very clear that there could be no better source of information than Fr Tony's work. Therefore, with the permission of the publisher and of Fr Tony's executors (he passed away in 2007) I have quoted him verbatim, only paring down material here and there to keep the focus on history and details specific to the chapel itself – which I expected would be the primary interest of 'Friends' and others buying this booklet.

I have also taken the liberty of moving his Chapter One to later in the text so as to support a continuous timeline from the earliest records to the present day.

Before we turn to Fr Tony's text, I thought it was important to ensure that visitors to the Lady Chapel get there in the first place, and so...

If you have driven into Osmotherley along Clack Lane from the A19 and have come to the 'T' junction in the centre of the village, turn left into North Side (brown signposted to Cote Ghyll Caravan Park & Youth Hostel). Just as you leave the 20mph speed limit and reach the last of the houses, there is a turn-off to the left and a wooden sign to the Cleveland Way. While it is possible with care to drive up to the Lady Chapel, it would be better to park on the main road (but not in the side road) and walk up – it's only a little over half a mile.

Follow the paved road as it begins to climb the hillside. As it levels off it becomes a single-lane track which, after a short distance, forks to the right – signposted to the Lady Chapel – and the climb begins again. All the way, on a clear day, there are stunning views to your left across to the Yorkshire Dales National Park in the distance to the start of the Pennines beyond that. Fr Tony used to plant saplings along the path and many of the trees that you will pass are the fruit of his labours.

The track levels off once again and, on the right-hand side, you will notice the first of a series of plain wooden crosses forming a Way of the Cross. As you reach the Ninth Station, the steps ahead of you lead to the grassy area in front of the Lady Chapel, the Stations continuing around its perimeter. The hillside to the left drops down to the ruins of Mount Grace Priory.

The Lady Chapel itself is left unlocked so that people can go inside and spend some time in prayer - it would certainly be difficult to find a more peaceful and secluded spot whether inside the chapel or outside.

Fr Neil McNicholas

CHAPTER ONE

The Earliest Records

Why was there a chapel there in the first place? Was it primarily to a shrine of Our Lady, a holy spring, or a sacred burial place that secret pilgrimages had continued over the centuries? And how did it come about that the Franciscans were invited to Osmotherley to look after pilgrims in 1665; and that after they left in 1830 the site was lost and almost forgotten until the chance discovery in 1942? These questions led to the study which is the subject of this account. And while mysteries remain unsolved, the whole intriguing story of the chapel has begun to unravel.

Before the Reformation there is no discernible tradition of pilgrimage, but there are pointers. In 1366 the manor of Bordelby, within which Mount Grace Priory and Lady Chapel¹ stand, was conveyed by John of Bentley to the Provost of Beverley, Richard Ravenser, Marmaduke Constable, and others, probably for some religious purpose of which they were to be trustees.²

Then in 1398 Thomas de Holand, created Duke of Surrey by Richard II, was granted licence to found a Carthusian House 'in his manor of Bordelby'. It was founded in honour of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin and Saint Nicholas, and was to be called the House of Mount Grace of Ingleby. In 1400 he was executed, along with Archbishop Scrope of York, for resisting the new King, Henry IV.

The location of Lady Chapel seems to indicate that there was a holy spring, up on the hillside, already known. That a chapel should be established for the monks' use some short distance from the monastery itself was not unusual at other charterhouses, but to place it up a steep pathway that needed to be stepped much of the way was most unusual. Two hundred years after the Dissolution of the priory, the name 'Lady Steps' still occurs on an old map of 1768, and they are shown on an engraving of the ruined chapel. A spring rising behind the chapel buildings is clearly to be seen, and it is to this spring, and not to the chapel to the left of it, that the steps ascend. The spring, as well as the chapel, was regarded as a source of healing in a nineteenth-century pamphlet.³ The original source may have been interfered with when the present cottage was rebuilt in 1916, the cottage itself standing on an earlier foundation.

¹ People generally refer to *the* Lady Chapel, but Fr Tony shows a preference throughout of calling it simply Lady Chapel without the definite article.

² *Y.A.J.*, Vol.XVIII, p.252.

³ Rev. J. Graves, *History of Cleveland* (1808).

During its latter years, Mount Grace Priory was renowned for its holiness of life, and was one of the few houses growing in numbers, and with a waiting list, at the Dissolution in 1539. The monastery's connections with Lady Chapel date mostly from this final period, and the chapel's foundations reveal that it was built before the end of the fifteenth century - about the same time as some of the later cells in the monastery below. Amongst the writings of Richard Methley, monk and mystic of Mount Grace from 1476 until his death about 1525, is a letter to one: 'Hew Heremyte, a psytyl of Solytary Lyfe now a dayes', in which Hugh is described as living in Our Lady's chapel on the mount.

He must have lived within the chapel, for the plinths of the chapel go right round it, indicating that it stood alone. Two rooms or cells were later added, one at right angles to the north-eastern corner and a smaller one parallel to the chapel on the north side, but separated from it by a small garden or court. Against the chapel of the north wall there remains a springer [the lowest stone in an arch where the curve begins] for a porch and possible stairway to an upper floor over a larger room. One cell seems to have been built for a resident monk or hermit, for there is a hatch let into the wall for passing things through, as in the Priory below. The other room may have served for a visitor or lay-brother.

CHAPTER TWO

The Dissolution

Thomas Parkinson

Our certain knowledge of a permanent resident at the house or cell next to the Lady Chapel starts with the story of Thomas Parkinson.

In the Acts of the Martyrs,⁴ Foxe recounts that one Thomas Parkinson was born in Bedale in 1488, and at the age of twelve was apprenticed tailor to Thomas Dent of Thirsk for seven years. In 1508 he was married to Agnes Halliwell of Ripon in Thirsk church. Two years later their first child was stillborn and, being unbaptised, [the practice then was that] the baby was not allowed a Christian burial, but was laid to rest by the midwife and other women in a field. A week or two later the corpse was uncovered by a raven and the parents, shocked and filled with guilt, vowed themselves to chastity and to separate. Thomas became a Franciscan at Richmond in 1511, and then became a hermit and penitent at Thirsk.

⁴ *Foxe's Acts of the Martyrs*, 4th edition, revised by Josiah Pratt.

Agnes became a Franciscan sister and, with the help of Sir James Strangways, was provided with a room in Northallerton. Foxe writes that when it was seen that Thomas liked, and could endure, the life of an anchorite, 'there was a chapel and a place provided for him in the Mount of Grace, above the Charterhouse, by Queen Katharine [of Aragon], and he was professed in that house by one Dr Makerel, then suffrage to Cardinal Wolsey'. According to Foxe, then, Parkinson entered the hermitage at Lady Chapel in 1515, and seems to have stayed there until the dissolution of the Priory.

The Strangways Family

With Thomas Parkinson we enter into the world of one of several important families in the history of Lady Chapel. The Strangways family had their seat at Whorlton Castle [now in ruins and near the abandoned village of Whorlton above the road between Stokesley and Thirsk]. They then took over East and West Harlsey [3 miles north-east of Northallerton on the other side of the A19 from Mount Grace] building the castle there in 1432. Sir James Strangways, supporter of the House of York, was three times High Sheriff, and became Speaker of the House of Commons in 1461. His son Richard married Elizabeth Neville, descendent of Joan of Kent whose grandson had founded Mount Grace Priory, and there Richard chose to be buried in 1488.

Their son, also James, married to Alice Scrope of Masham, continued the royal connection. In 1512 Queen Katharine, now married to Henry VIII, was left in charge of the country while Henry was at war in France, and she received much acclaim when James IV of Scotland invaded England and met death and disaster at Flodden Field in 1513. Sir James Strangways was among those knighted at Flodden, while his son, Sir Thomas, married Anne, the sister of the commander at Flodden, Thomas Dacre. He too was buried at Mount Grace. Thus it was that Sir James was able to approach Queen Katharine regarding the installation of Thomas Parkinson at Lady Chapel.

Queen Katharine herself was devoted both to the Carthusians, many of whom were to die for their loyalty to her cause, and to the Franciscans. It was to the Franciscans that Thomas and Agnes Parkinson had turned after the tragedy of their child, and that Franciscan connection was to be restored with the Friars' return to Osmotherley in 1665, which we will come to later. Osmotherley's loyalty and regard for Queen Katharine is reflected in the title of the Queen Katharine Inn, originally on the north side of the village square. Inns named after her would generally have been

changed after Henry's divorce and marriage to Anne Boleyn, but the local people held to Katharine.

After the Dissolution the lands and buildings of Mount Grace came into the possession of Sir James Strangways, and although the property passed to his brother-in-law, Robert Roos, after his death in 1541, his widow was left in possession for her lifetime.

Meanwhile, John Wilson, the last Prior of Mount Grace, was granted a pension, and given the Lady Chapel apparently in perpetuity.⁵ But after the death of Henry and the accession of Edward VI, religious pressure seems to have driven him overseas and, after his return, he settled at Sheen where he died. It may have been during this time that the chapel was unroofed and left ruinous.

The Middleton Family

At this time the stewardship or management of much of the property in the area was in the hands of the Middleton family. Thomas Middleton became Sheriff of York and in 1531 married Jane Turner, by whom he had two sons and two daughters, one of whom was Margaret, later to become wife of John Clitherow. In 1552⁶ we find that a Thomas Middleton, probably Margaret's father, holding land at Lady Chapel Farm, was being paid an annuity by John Wilson in Lady Chapel; and after he left we find one of Thomas' sons, also Thomas, was still holding land at Lady Chapel Farm in 1570.

CHAPTER THREE

Three Elizabethan Martyrs

We know nothing of Lady Chapel during the Elizabethan period. The abortive Rising of the Northern Earls brought heavy persecution for those of the old faith in Yorkshire meaning Catholic life went underground. But by the end of the century something had happened that changed the situation radically.

Disturbed at the continued success of, and popular support for, the new seminary priests and Jesuits who were landing in the North through the ports of Whitby and Newcastle, a statute known as the Act against Jesuits was enacted in 1585,⁷ creating a new crime of high treason to be laid against any lay person for hiding, harbouring, or even in any way relieving

⁵ *Dugdale's Monasticism*, Vol.VI, pp.22-24.

⁶ Public Record Office, London, Suppression Papers, no.1552.

⁷ 27 Elizabeth, c.2.

a priest coming from abroad. Within a year two lay folk were to be executed precisely for that, and a third was a priest whom they had harboured. All three were well-known, and highly respected. All were closely associated with Osmotherley and Mount Grace, their families holding lands in the area. They were: Marmaduke Bowes, executed on 26 November 1585; Margaret Clitherow, executed on 25 March 1586; and Francis Ingleby, executed on 3 June 1586. A look at some family connections may point towards the possibility of their making the chapel a secret burial place, and hence a shrine in the years that followed.

The Bowes Family

Marmaduke Bowes was of Angram Grange, near Appleton-le-Wiske. The charge against him was that he had given a mug of ale to Hugh Taylor, a priest who had called at his door. The schoolmaster in Marmaduke's service had betrayed the priest, who had later been captured and committed to York Castle for trial. Learning of this, Marmaduke had ridden to York to speak for him and was recognised and seized. Condemned and hanged for 'harbouring', he was the first in England to suffer under the new statute.

Margaret Clitherow, herself in prison in York at that time, must have been aware of all this, because Sir George Bowes, Marmaduke's uncle, and her own father, Thomas Middleton, had been members of York Corporation together only a few years before. Only four months later she herself was arraigned under the statute, and tried by the very same judges.

This same Sir George Bowes, had been entrusted earlier with escorting Mary Queen of Scots after her appeal to Queen Elizabeth for asylum. One of his sons, William Bowes of Ellerbeck, married Mary Scrope, daughter of the 9th Baron Scrope of Bolton, and it was one of their children who was arraigned at Lady Chapel in 1614.

The Ingleby Family

When Marmaduke Bowes came up before the court, John Ingleby, jurist, came to speak on his behalf, but without success. Meanwhile, John Ingleby's brother, Francis, had just been ordained priest in the seminary at Rheims in 1584, and sent to England. It was on his account that Margaret Clitherow was to be charged with 'harbouring'.

The Ingleby family are central to our story. In 1397, a year before the Carthusians came to Mount Grace, Sir John Ingleby, judge, had been granted licence for Mass to be said in the chapel of his manor house in Bordelby. His brother, William, was already a priest and was later to become a monk at Mount Grace. The manor house adjoined the site of the

new monastery, and Thomas de Holland, Duke of Surrey, and the Ingleby family were from the beginning regarded as co-founders. The original charter is still held by the family in Ripley Castle, near Harrogate. When, in 1440, the monks' title of possession seemed in question, Parliament recognised the Inglebys as patrons of Mount Grace and confirmed their title.

At about the time of the Dissolution, Sir William Ingleby of Ripley married Anne Mallory of Studley Royal and of their twelve children, the second son, David, married Lady Anne Neville and their daughter, Mary, married Peter Middleton, Margaret Clitherow's great-nephew. Another son, Francis, became a priest and confessor to Margaret and was executed three months after her in 1586. The fourth son, John, was the lawyer who came to speak for Marmaduke Bowes.

The Clitherow Family

The spelling of the name Clitherow belonged to the Yorkshire branch of the family, the Lancashire spelling being Clitheroe.⁸ There were Clitherows holding property in Hull and the East Riding in the fifteenth century, and in York they were of some importance. A butcher by trade, John Clitherow first married Matilda Mudd who died in 1570, leaving two young children, Thomas and William. Following her death, he married Margaret Middleton and, besides fostering Matilda's two children, Margaret had two of her own, Henry and Anne.

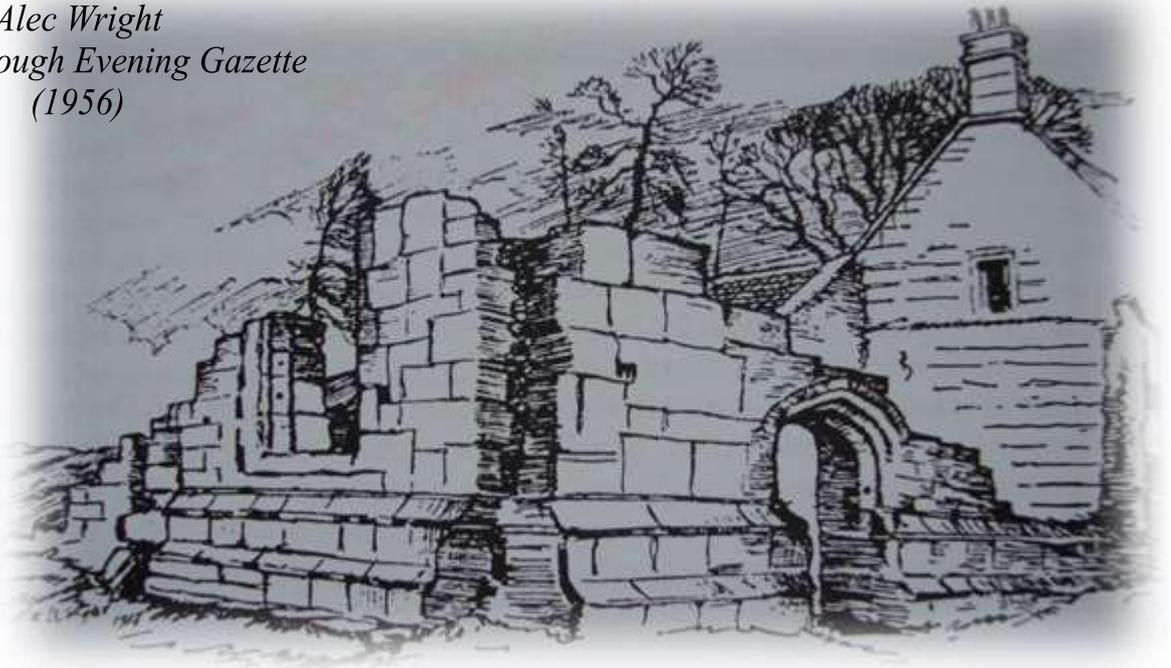
After Margaret's fearsome death on Lady Day, 1586, John continued in the established church. However, his brother William, at first partially conforming, had already slipped overseas to the college at Rheims under Cardinal Allen, where he was ordained priest. One of John's sisters, Elizabeth, married a Thomas Grene of Lanmoth just outside Osmotherley, and their daughter-in-law, Mary Grene, was among those arrested at Lady Chapel in 1614.

Of John's older children, William and Thomas were both presented for recusancy in 1599. Thomas died imprisoned in the Blockhouses of Hull in 1603. William escaped abroad to Douai, where he was ordained priest in 1608, and after returning to England was several times in prison. He finally became chaplain to the Cholmeley family at Brandsby, and benefitting from the wealth that his mother, Matilda Mudd, had left him, he was able to make bequests to the Cholmeley, Constable, Crathorne and other local families when he died in 1636. Thus the Middletons and Clitherows, had deep roots in north and east Yorkshire.

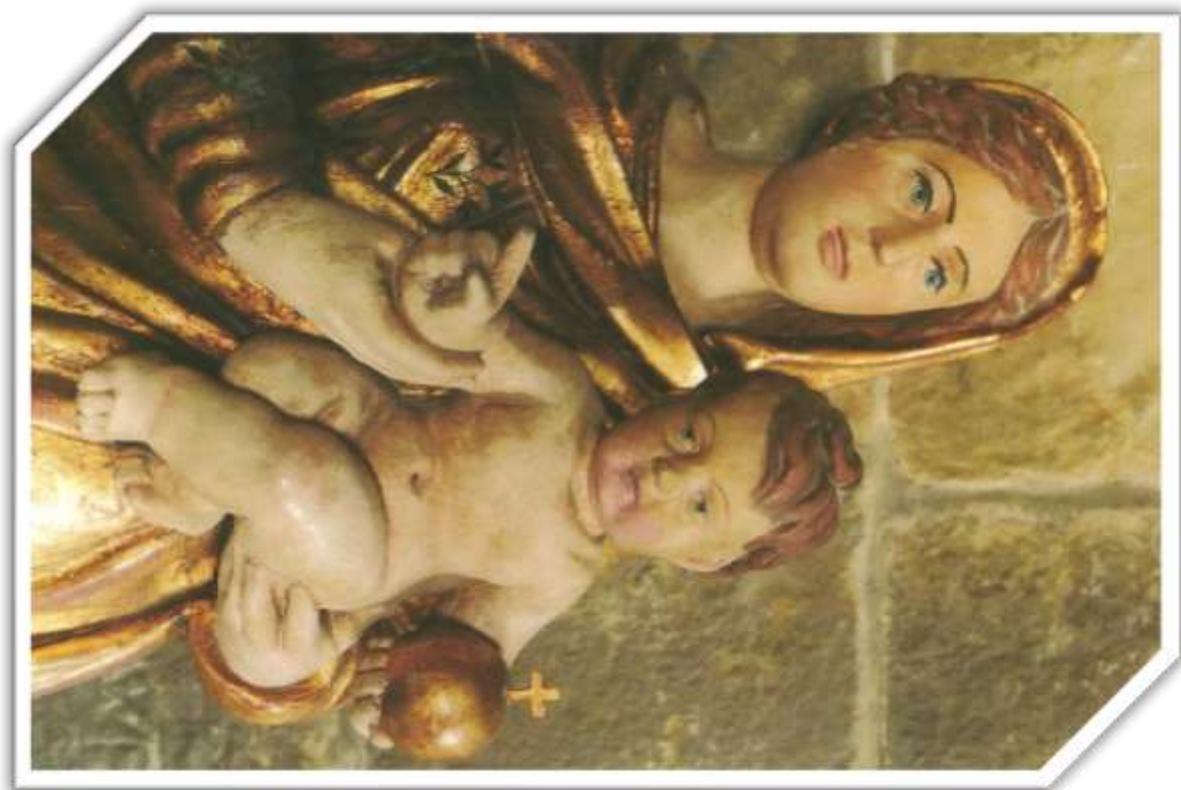
⁸ O.Clitheroe, 'A Clitheroe History: Merchant to Mayor', Bar Convent Archives, York.



*Alec Wright
Middlesbrough Evening Gazette
(1956)*







CHAPTER FOUR

The Stuart Period 1600-1700

Roofless and ruined though it was, Lady Chapel became notorious throughout the Stuart period for the number and variety of pilgrims going up there, and towards the end of the century plans were afoot to restore it. The alarm of the authorities was first expressed in a decree of the Commission for Ecclesiastical Causes at York, dated 5 September 1614.⁹ Addressed to all Justices of the Peace, Mayors, Sheriffs, Bailiffs, Constables and other officers within the Province of York, it was entitled 'Commission for Pilgrims' and read:

Whereas it is enformed that diverse and sundrie superstitious and popishlie affected persons, have frequented and still doe frequent (in manner of pilgrimage) to repare to a Certaine Chappell or Hermitayge, nere unto the late dissolved Monasterie of Mount Grace, in Cleveland of the dioces of Yorke, especiallie on the Ladies, and other Saintes eves, and certaine other sett and appointed tymes by the people of that countrie observed and noted, att which place and tymes, the saide persons flocking together, doe observe and practise divers and superstitious and popish ceremonies, And have certaine unlawfull Conventicles for the acting and performing of sundrie such popishe, idle, and superstitious pilgrimages and like vanyties: And forasmuch as those persons that doe repare thither, come secretlie and closelie and for the moste parte in the nighte tyme, whose names are not knowne certainlie, the rather for that some of theme are thought to come from farr: Therefore...We doe in the Kynges Majesties name...will and comaund you, that you doe attach and apprehend, or cause to be apprehended, not onlie all and everie suche person and persons, as youe or anie of youe shall take at the saide Chappell or Hermytage at anie tyme thereafter, and to sett downe their names, surnames and quallities and other circumstances which maye tend to the siftinge owt of the cause and purpose of their cominge thither. And upon their apprehension to bringe them furthwith before us...

It was on 7 September, 1614,¹⁰ the eve of Little Lady Day, that multiple arrests were made at Lady Chapel itself. There were sixteen persons in all, and most of them were connected with the Bowes, Ingleby, or Clitherow families. In court on 4 October they confessed they were recusants, had

⁹ Record Office, Narthallerton. MS, 2FL 56.

¹⁰ Borthwick Institute, York, High Commission Act Books, no.9 (1612-1625), ff.31sqq.

been at the chapel and had prayed there. They were ordered to appear at the Market Cross, Northallerton, in full market on the following Wednesday, and to confess. Sureties were demanded from Christopher Simpson and others, but they didn't appear. The following March they were hauled before Archbishop Tobias Matthew and their names – some conforming, and some not – continued to appear in the Act Books in subsequent years.¹¹

Mary Ward and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary

That the Chapel was by now a place of pilgrimage is further borne out by the visit of Mary Ward in 1642. The Ward family seat was at Givendale, near Ripon, but the family owned other properties including at Mulwith where Mary was born in 1585. At the age of seven Mary went to stay at Ploughland in Holderness where her grandmother lived and who was related by marriage to Sir William Ingleby and Sir George Bowes. She had ministered for years to priests imprisoned in the Blockhouses of Hull, and had herself spent, altogether, some fourteen years in prison in York Castle at the same time as Margaret Clitherow.

Mary returned home to Mulwith in 1594, but had to move again after a disastrous fire and went to live at Harewell. She was now coming up to sixteen years of age, and hence answerable for recusancy fines, so she moved again this time to Osgodby. In 1606, aged 21, in the aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot with its added pressure on Catholics, and in which her uncles had been deeply implicated, Mary went overseas to join the Poor Clares at Saint Omer. Her calling lay elsewhere, however, and she returned home to gather a group of some seven friends who were to become the first professed community of women, unenclosed, and not wearing a religious habit, who dedicated themselves to the education of girls, of all classes no matter how poor, right across Europe.

They came to London in 1639, but the new atmosphere of tolerance came to a sudden end with the outbreak of the Civil War, and for security's sake they left London in three coaches to come north, stopping at Newby and Ripley before entering Hutton Rudby on 14 September 1642. They rented a farmhouse nearby, formerly belonging to Mount Grace Priory, but now in the possession of John Ingleby.

When Mary fell seriously ill, the sisters made a pilgrimage to Lady Chapel to pray for her, and on her recovery she herself went up there in thanksgiving. The account of their visit was recorded in Winifred Wigmore's diary:

¹¹ *Ibid.*

About the middle of October [1642] she fell very Sicke as her life was held in great danger, and her recovery attributed to a pilgrimage made for her to [the chapel] a place to this day of great devotion & where many graces are graunted, though so destroyed and defaced, as onely the bare 4 walls remaine without rooffe or cover, & in regard to the great height of the Mountayne on which it Stands exposed to very great winds. Yet shall you find Catholikes praying there howers together, & this Pilgrimage herselfe made when recovered from the above sayd sickness.

In 1644 the isolation and the growing dangers of the Civil War led them to go down to Heworth outside York, to a house leased to them by the Thwing family. There Mary Ward died the following year.

Lady Juliana Walmesley and the Franciscan Foundation

In 1650, during the protectorate of Cromwell, a remarkable lady, related by marriage to Sir Thomas Gascoigne, prepared the way for the Franciscan Friars to come to Osmotherley, where she established them in the Old Hall, North End, in 1665 ‘for the help and support of pilgrims’. Lady Juliana Walmesley was originally from a Lancashire family, but lived with her husband, Sir Thomas Walmesley, at Cowthorpe near Wetherby. (One of her sisters-in-law, Ann, married William Middleton, a cousin of Margaret Clitherow.) A son of Juliana, William, had a house chaplain, Father Francis Osbaldeston O.F.M., who was her brother-in law. It was at her request that he came to help set up a Franciscan Friary in York in 1637, the year Sir Tomas died. At the Restoration she asked Father Francis to start a community at Osmotherley, and in the name of Sir Godfrey Copeley, husband of her daughter Eleanor, she bought the Old Hall in trust for the Franciscans.

Osmotherley House was given us by Lady Juliana Walmsley with all the outhouses, a little garden and field, for which she also bought an estate in the Dales of twenty pounds annually, and gave it is forever on condition of keeping one in the same house for performing there duties “for the benefit, devotion, and comfort of pilgrims”.¹²

The pilgrims were, of course, visitors to Lady Chapel. At the time ownership of the chapel seems to have lapsed. In 1635 Thomas Lascelles had purchased the whole Mount Grace property from Conyers Darcy of Hornby Castle and built the present manor house. But in 1668, the year of Lady Juliana’s death, a 999-year lease of High Wood, Summer Close, and Winter Chapel Close – where Lady Chapel is located – was agreed

¹² B.Parry, OFM. Archives. Forest Gate, London E7. Reg.2, Invent.J.

between Francis Calvert, a close friend of Lady Juliana whom she had made trustee of the Osmotherley Friary, and Thomas Lascelles. Clear possession of the chapel by the Franciscans is indicated by the account in 1677 of a young friar, Hugh Goodyear, who was buried ‘*in sacello supra montem*’ – in the shrine on the hill.¹³

Fr Francis had become Superior in 1672, setting in motion plans to establish a school in Osmotherley, but with the advent of William of Orange he was imprisoned in York. The school somehow survived aided by rents and revenues negotiated by Fr Langworth, Superior at Osmotherley. Upon his release from prison in 1686, Fr Francis gave instructions more than once to ‘repair the old Chapel’, however when Lady Elizabeth Pierrepont, granddaughter of Robert, Earl of Kingston-upon-Hull, presented various gifts for use at the Lady Chapel, because the proposed repairs had not been carried out, they are thought to have graced the chapel in the Franciscan house in Osmotherley instead.

In 1728 Father Peter Adams, alias Watson, succeeded Ambrose Ogle as Superior, and this was the beginning of a turbulent period for the Franciscan community, seeing expulsions and suspensions (in 1737 and 1739) and long-running controversies between the secular and regular clergy which only ended in 1753.

Franciscan life continued during the latter years of the century, Osmotherley being elevated, briefly, to become the novitiate for England after the expulsion of the friars from France at the Revolution; and between then and 1830 at least eight friars are recorded as dying there, but as numbers were declining the remaining friars were transferred to Solihull, and for two years the Old Hall remained empty. After Catholic emancipation in 1829, it was the secular clergy, at first from Stockton and later from Stokesley, who came to serve the chapel in Osmotherley, but until the immediate post-war years it was only a few unnamed and unrecognised ‘pilgrims’ who would climb up the overgrown path to the ruined Lady Chapel. The first organised pilgrimage only took place in 1958.

CHAPTER FIVE

Flora Morrish’s First Visit – 1916

This chapter was not originally part of Fr Tony Storey’s book. I include this material because it provides a useful bridge in the story of the

¹³ *Catholic Record Society*, Vol.XXIV, p.272.

rediscovery of the Lady Chapel. My reference source was *The Pilgrims' Way* written by Flora Morrish, edited by Flora Dysart, and published in 2006 by Dysart Associates.

Flora relates her first visit to the Lady Chapel with her daughters in 1916. She had rented a cottage in Osmotherley and her neighbour, an elderly farmer, suggested they should go and see the "ladies' chapel". He went on to say that "It's nowt but a ruin now and only used for a cow-shed and sheep shelter" but was in a "bonny spot". The first day they got slightly lost and ended up on top of the quarry cliff above the chapel which they could see but couldn't reach. The next day they tried again and this time eventually stumbled across the ruins of the chapel and cottage. She describes the cottage as being "a filthy 'shippen' (cow shed)" and that the roof had fallen to the floor in many places. The walls, west window and two doorways of the chapel still remained, as did the two cells behind the cottage. "Nettles, gooseberry bushes and brambles had gained possession, and stones from the walls were strewn in all directions. Some lay in circles surrounding burnt ashes, giving sad evidence of many picnics." On another occasion they discovered picnickers actually pushing stones from the walls.

This prompted her to write to Sir Hugh Bell, who owned the ruins, to inform him of the damage that was being caused and of her love and deep concern for the place. He fenced off the ruins, renovated the cottage, and allowed her family to live there during the summer months of the post-First World War years. Fr Tony records that in 1924, a Father Moran was called in to do a formal exorcism of a friendly ghost that used to visit them.

CHAPTER SIX

The Excavation of the Chapel Area

We return to Fr Tony's account:

After the purchase of the ruined chapel and cottage, it was in February 1954 that Lady Magdalen Eldon asked Kenneth Croft Andrew to examine the area of the chapel. A full archeological investigation was not envisaged, but rather an examination of the foundations prior to any rebuilding, and the clearance of the garden within the chapel walls to find out if any burials had taken place there.

Before commencing, Croft Andrew expressed his concern about the site being open and that the comings and goings of workmen would lead to inquisitive gossip. He also expressed the hope that one day the cottage area would be explored and a search made to uncover the spring that was known to be somewhere to the east. Before the dig began, masses of garden soil and rubbish had to be cleared from the floor, including old currant and gooseberry bushes. Along with workmen from the Eldon Estates, boys and monks from Ampleforth College were enlisted to do the physical work, and, while there was little local interest at first, the ongoing passage of men up and down the farm track soon aroused curiosity in the village.

Little of import was found in the soil and debris, apart from a medieval jetton [a gambling counter or token], small pieces of sixteenth-century pottery, scraps of glass and leading from the windows, one piece of lead of several ounces in weight, and pieces of decayed oyster shell so often found in ancient religious houses. As they proceeded towards the western end, ‘we came at last upon objects of a difference’, Andrew wrote, ‘fragments of human bone, a single tooth, tiny coils of metallic wire, coloured bright green by copper salts’. Then, on the final day of excavation, at about five o’clock on the afternoon of Tuesday, 25th May, they came upon the mouth of a grave. ‘The grave had been disturbed at some date and the mouth was filled with disturbed soil and quantities of disordered human bones. Proceeding to lift the bones at the head and foot of the grave, we soon had in view two skulls, one (A) shattered with its mandible behind it, and one (B) perfect, little out of its proper position. At the opposite end of the grave we had in view a set of leg bones in good order.’

A workman was sent down the farm track to telephone Ralph Scrope, who came up straightaway from Yarm. But the site was open and unfenced, and very soon children, home from school, and others were coming up the track. It seemed essential to lift the remains at once. ‘Archeologically the procedure was unethical,’ wrote Andrew, ‘but in view of my past experience elsewhere, I could not contemplate leaving the bones overnight. When, therefore, some hasty photographs had been taken, and examination carried out as far as the fading light permitted, we lifted the critical deposit onto a door, upon which it was carried into the cottage.’

The grave contents revealed that a body (A) had been buried there, seemingly not before the late 1550s, since bits of glass and lead were in the bottom of the grave indicating the windows were already broken; and that not many years later, the bones, still held together by their cartilages,

had been parted, leaving some bones underneath, to make way for a second burial of a very different kind. This was skeleton (B), revealing vestiges of a linen shroud, and arms extended outside the thighs. It had been tied in several directions with a silver cord laterally across the vortex of the skull, over the chest, and several times around the waist. The cord had a central core of hemp, and outside that a continuous spinning of base silver wire, some nine or ten yards in length.

The body was laid in a thin oak coffin, very well made, and of rare use in sixteenth-century burials. Four large nails had been driven through the bottom board to hold a chock to keep the head and neck in position, as though for carriage, possibly on pack-horse or over uneven ground. Nails indicated a possible second chock at the waist. Stains left by the green copper salts from the silver wire indicated that the cord had been passed over and around the body, and probably hitched to the chocks. Over the body was a wrapping, and a layer of hundreds of box [hedge] leaves, placed over strips of birch bark stitched together into a smooth sheet. ‘Skeleton (B) appeared to me complete,’ Andrew wrote, ‘both arms and hands lying in due order, though the sternum had been a little disturbed, and...two or three of the ribs showed imperfect fractures.’

The remains were removed to Ampleforth, but it was not until the end of June that Professor Cave, comparative anatomist of Saint Bartholomew’s Hospital Medical School, London, first examined them. Of the items surrounding skeleton (B) which were dispatched to London, the birch bark, box leaves, and oaken coffin were examined at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, and the linen of the shroud was identified as of late Tudor period.

Cave concluded firmly that skeleton (A) was male and that skeleton (B) was female but with male characteristics, and that for a number of reasons this could not be the body of Margaret Clitherow. No full report was ever written, but in a formal ‘Note on the Osmotherley skeletons’ dated November 1960, he wrote:

Repeated detailed examination made of female skeleton B to assess age of individual at death. This, on the anatomical and pathological evidence of the bones, cannot be less than 40 years, and is more probably 45-55 years, with an indeterminate upper limit. It manifests some peculiarly masculine cranial characteristics, so that, by itself, the skull affords no unequivocal evidence as to sex of the individual. The pelvis (happily complete) is certainly female, but extremely atypical. Obstetrically it is a ‘small round pelvis’ – the variety nowadays rendering Caesarean section the elective mode of delivery.

Individual B must either have experienced great difficulty in childbirth or else have given birth to very small babies. In my opinion, the estimated age at death and the pelvic conformation are inconsistent with attribution to Margaret Clitherow.’

The following is an extract from the report on the examination of the two skeletons by Doctors Charlotte Roberts and Keith Manchester of the Calvin Wells Laboratory, Department of Archaeological Sciences, University of Bradford, when the grave was opened once again in 1988:¹⁴

The skeletal remains of two adult individuals (A and B) were examined for age, sex, metrical characteristics, and pathological features. Skeleton A was reasonably complete except for most of the vertebral column, hands and feet. Some of the long bones and ribs were fragmented and the skull vault consisted of many pieces. Skeleton B was more complete, only missing the right hand, most of the left, and the majority of the foot bones. It appears that from the features observed on both skeletons they are both male. In fact, Skeleton A was more problematical to sex having several morphological features both in the skull and pelvis attributable to females. The sternum was undoubtedly male. Both individuals were determined to be not more than 35 years of age at death, or alternatively young adults. It seems that both age and sex of Skeleton B do not agree with the observations made by Cave.

The mystery remains.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Lady Chapel Today

After the clearance of the ruined chapel, the adjoining cottage could not be allowed to remain empty. It had probably been built in the eighteenth century, but was restored by Sir Hugh Bell in 1916, as recorded on a memorial plaque in the living room. [As we’ve seen] during the post-war years the Morrish family lived there, and it continued to be inhabited and was only vacated when the estate came up for sale.

In the summer of 1954 John and Ordie McComb and their young family became the new tenants. Like their predecessors they were without road access, electricity, or telephone. For the next three years they drew their clear fresh water by pump from the storage chamber outside the front door.

¹⁴ The full report was printed in *Forensic Science International*, 57 (1992).

This had probably been constructed with the rebuilding of the cottage in 1916 and was emptied and cleared of debris before they moved in. It filled up almost immediately, evidently being a remnant of the ancient spring which was still seen flowing at the turn of the century. Movement of clay down the bank may have covered this over, and in December 1955 Mr Bowen, a water diviner, doing work at the farm below, came up and claimed to locate ‘the source of two underground springs that meet just behind the oak tree at the back of the house’.

Ralph Scrope then asked Mr Robson, a York architect, who had restored the shrine of Margaret Clitherow in the Shambles, to draw up plans for the restoration of Lady Chapel. These were approved by the North Riding County Council in 1956 and planning permission was granted in the following year.

Lady Chapel was scheduled as a National Monument in February 1958. This was the centenary year of Our Lady’s apparitions at Lourdes, and to celebrate the year the Knights of Saint Columba, Legion of Mary, and other groups organised the first Diocesan Pilgrimage for the Feast of the Assumption. This annual pilgrimage has continued ever since.

Work on the restoration began in 1959. Fred Handley of Helmsley, builder, took charge, selecting much of his material from the closely matching stone of the remains of Rosedale Abbey. One can easily discern the slightly larger stones of the original chapel reaching about two metres in height, while those of the original east wall, weathered over the centuries, have remained mostly intact.

Besides the presence of masons’ marks at ground level, one can make out remnants of scores of inscriptions, initials, and prayers of pilgrims incised into the old stone during penal times. Most common amongst these are the Calvary crosses, associated with pilgrimage to the Holy Land – that is, a cross mounted on one or two sloping steps, and with or without initials on either flank. Of the earliest to be dated are one on the inside north wall, 1647, and one on the outside of the same wall, initialled ‘O.C., 1649’; the next one is dated 1721. Some prayers, or fragments of prayers were visible not that long ago, such as ‘mercy on me’, ‘to thy cross I flee’, ‘Son of Mary hear’ etc. Initials such as I.H.S., I.W., W.B. are legible, and a full name appears, along with other illegible markings on the eastern wall. Around the south doorway on the inside were clearly incised the names of a man and his wife, as well as other illegible lettering. Also revealed were the foundations of a step up to the sanctuary area. Rebates in the wall and two post-holes indicate the early presence of a wooden screen.

The seventeenth-century statue of the Madonna and Child which came to adorn the chapel after its completion was presented by Lady Eldon. A moving story lies behind the carved wooden Crucifix above the altar which Lady Eldon also gave. Visiting Germany in the early years of Hitler's regime, she had admired it in an antiques shop, and approached the proprietor. He offered it to her as a free gift, if she could procure his emigration – for he was a Jew. This she duly did. It thus hangs as a reminder of the Holocaust, and as a precious symbol of liberation. The windows carry the arms of Queen Katharine of Aragon, and of the Scrope and Eldon families in whose memorial the chapel stands restored. The oak door comes from the workshop of Thompson of Kilburn.

On 8 September 1961, the feast of Our Lady's Birthday, or Little Lady Day, the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal William Godfrey, celebrated Mass and re-dedicated the chapel. This was done quietly and simply in the early evening. With him were Bishop George Brunner of Middlesbrough, Ralph and Lady Beatrice Scrope, Lord and Lady Eldon, Sir James Strangways, Kenneth Croft Andrew, and half-a-dozen others.

Hitherto Lady Chapel and Osmotherley had been served from the parish of Stokesley, but, in 1965, the Franciscan Friars were invited to return to their old home in Osmotherley once again 'for the help and support of pilgrims', whose numbers were now considerable. During the following years Father Dunstan Baker O.F.M., guardian of the Friary, developed the amenities available for pilgrims to Lady Chapel.

[My note: In 1985 the current Blessed Sacrament Chapel was built using the foundations of the old hermitage together with a small cloister connecting it with the Barn and the Lady Chapel. In 1990 the complex was completed with the rebuilding of the toilets.]

By the end of 1993 the Franciscans were finding it difficult to staff and serve the parish and the pilgrimages, and Bishop Crowley invited the monks of Ampleforth Abbey to establish a priory in the Osmotherley house. Assisted by lay volunteers they looked after the buildings and helped to organise pilgrimages and quiet days.

[The following is a further update to Fr Tony's information.] In 2013 the Benedictines came to a decision to leave Osmotherley due to falling numbers available to fulfil the commitments of their Abbey community. Thereafter the Lady Chapel has been served from St Mary's Cathedral, providing a Mass at 4pm every Saturday with confessions from 3:30pm.

Apart from continuing to be visited by passers-by and pilgrims in general, the chapel is also used by school groups and for parish day retreats. However, because it is so popular – which is good to be able to report – it is essential to reserve the use of the chapel well in advance in order to avoid double-bookings. All enquiries should be made to the Curial Office on (01642) 850505.

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