

THE CHURCH OF ST. SAVIOUR, STYDD

A lecture to the Ribchester Local History Society, delivered on 25 June 2019 by Peter Openshaw

Introduction

Those of you who do not yet know the church of St Saviour's, Stydd, have a treat in store. Those who do know it, perhaps take for granted the very singular occurrence that an early medieval chapel stands more or less intact fully half a mile outside the village, in the middle of a field.

That prompts a number of interesting questions: when was it built, by whom, why was it built there and – most interestingly – how has it survived when so many other religious houses locally, and nationally, have become dilapidated and even ruined: one thinks locally of Whalley Abbey, or Sawley Abbey or Cockersand Abbey, near Cockerham and many others of which little or nothing now remains.

The age of the building

As to when it was built, the best clue is in the style of architecture evident in windows and doorway in the north wall, both now blocked up, which you can best see from the outside: they bear the characteristic rounded arches of the late Norman period; the door is topped by zig-zag or dog's tooth ornamentation, typical of the late twelfth century.

High up on the west wall is a doorway, now blocked off, which in former times probably gave access from the upper story of an adjacent building to a wooden gallery in the chapel.

The pointed doorway and some of the pointed lancet windows are typical of the English Early Gothic style, suggesting they were built in the late thirteenth century.

The door itself is heavily covered with graffiti; there was once a charming belief – but probably erroneous belief – that Cromwell's soldiers carved this on the way to the battle of Preston in 1648 during the course of the Second Civil War. I rather doubt that. Tom Smith writing in his History of Longridge in 1888 had a rather different view: 'No visitor can view calmly the names of nobodies who have scribbled their names over this sacred edifice'

Inside, the roof has tie beams with the holy monogram IHS (translated as Jesus the Saviour of Men).

In the floor beneath the altar, lie Sir Adam and Lady Alicia Clitheroe. Their badly damaged gravestone is carved with flowery crosses and a delicate Gothic canopy; one stone bears a sword and a spear; with fragments of a Latin inscription. This dates from 1350 or thereabouts.

There is also an empty stone coffin tomb, of great antiquity but who originally rested there is unknown.

The octagonal font is worth special attention. It is roughly carved of dark gritstone by some country craftsman in a naïve or rustic style.

Some facets depict religious symbols: thus one shows the sacred monogram IHS another shows the Bleeding Heart.

There are a variety of heraldic devices: what is plainly intended to be a rampant lion, but which more like a gambolling rabbit; another shows a crowned leopard's head, such as is depicted on Sterling Silver marks. Another depicts three arrowheads between a chevron, charged with three stars, being the arms of Sir Thomas Newport of Shropshire, the preceptor of the Knights Hospitallers at Newland. He died in 1502 and was buried in the citadel of the Order at Rhodes, where his memorial bears the same arms as are depicted here.

There is a similar font - perhaps even carved by the same hand - at the parish churches of St Bartholomew's, Chipping.

There is also an old piscina, to wash the chalice and paten plate used in communion.

The pulpit is early eighteenth century.

That is the evidence yielded by an examination of the building.

Archaeological examination

Attempts have been made to discover the origins of the settlement here by archaeological excavation. Just before the Great War, there was an extensive dig undertaken by staff and pupils from the nearby Stonyhust College; they were enthusiastic amateurs. They found the footings of

a small building, with rounded bays, like an apse, which they carefully drew. They were unable to determine whether this building was Roman or medieval, whether its purpose was secular or religious; they speculated that it might have been either a Roman Temple, perhaps dedicated to Mithras or an early Christian basilica, but these are only guesses.

The excavations found extensive charring among the footings, demonstrating that the building had at some time been extensively damaged by fire. Accidental fire was – and is - an ever-present threat to timber framed buildings. They even conjectured that the fire might have been deliberately burnt in one of the periodic Scottish raids; Robert the Bruce is known to have pillaged and laid waste to the area in the 1320s; that is an interesting speculation, but it is no more than that.

Further excavations, using modern techniques, were undertaken in the 1970s by Ben Edwards, then the County Archaeologist – that was in the distant past when the county could afford to fund such an important post - but he could not even locate the footings found in the Stonyhurst dig, since the plans which they made in 1913 had no fixed reference point to, say the church or to Stydd Manor Farm. So, none of the outstanding questions posed by their finds was answered.

More modern recent testing by UCLAN using geo-physical techniques has not come up with any clearer information either.

So much for the archaeological evidence.

Documentary evidence

I turn to consider the documentary evidence. In the mediaeval period few people could read and write; written documents were necessary only to show or transfer title to the land, or to evidence contracts or to draw up accounts or to pay dues or taxes. Once those purposes had been served, there was no need to preserve the record, so then – as now – records were destroyed after their preservation served no useful purpose. Such records as were not deliberately destroyed were vulnerable to loss through neglect, damp, acts of war, fire or flood. These documents were written on parchment or vellum, both being animal skins, and vulnerable to attack by rodents and insects; so, the survival of any medieval documents is a matter of chance.

The earliest surviving documentary record of a religious foundation at Stydd is in an undated

deed from the middle of the thirteenth century; it is written in Latin which, when translated, refers to ‘the hospital of St Saviour, under [the] Long Ridge and the Master and brethren also serving God there’; the context makes clear that the community had been established there for some decades already.

Other deeds, from roughly the same period, variously describe the principal of the hospital as being the Master, the Prior, the Chaplain and the Rector; these English words are again translations of the original Latin, the language of the Catholic church. The surviving documentary evidence, therefore, establishes that there was a small religious foundation on the site dating from that time but these sources provide no evidence as to the nature, extent or date of the foundation, nor indeed of the Order - if any - to which it was then attached.

The position after 1292 is clearer, for in that year an Inquiry, they called it an Inquisition - but the use of the word has none of the sinister associations which the word later carried - found that the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, had acquired the site from ‘Adam, the Chaplain-Warden of the house of St Saviour at Dutton’ together with the surrounding ploughlands, wood and moor and with rent from land in Dutton, Ribchester and elsewhere; from other references in the document, it is likely that the actual transfer took place some years earlier. This document gave no description or account of the pre-existing community.

It is on such slender evidence that historians must base their conclusions - or rather speculations - as to the origins of the foundation at Stydd. The evidence would suggest, therefore, the establishment in or about the year 1200, of a small religious house, which was later taken over by the Knights Hospitallers.

The siting of St Saviour’s, Stydd

I have now twice referred to St Saviour’s, the name by which the chapel is still known. But St Saviour incidentally is a mistranslation; the dedication is to Christ as ‘Sanctus Salvator’, the ‘Holy Saviour’ not St Saviour; Christ is not a Saint, but it is too late to change that now.

The name ‘Stydd’, which first occurs in 1276, is spelt in various ways. In Victorian times it was nearly always rendered as ‘Stid’. The word merely means ‘place’ or ‘farm’, an ‘estate in land’, which strongly supports the view that Stydd was even at that time a purely secular settlement.

The modern word 'stead', as in 'farmstead', or 'homestead' - and even 'bedstead' - has the same origin; as may the phrase 'instead of', which simply means 'in the place of'.

The next question is why a religious foundation was built here? In Roman times Ribchester was at the cross-roads of the main north/south road, from the fort at Chester to the Wall, which crossed the Ribble by the bridge here, and the east/west road crossing the Pennines, through the Aire Gap, roughly along the A59 from the fort at York. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that a small religious foundation on this site would have been convenient to give rest and shelter to travellers, particularly to pilgrims, on these roads, which may have survived into medieval times. 'Hospitals' in medieval England did more than treat the sick, they combined the functions of the modern hostel, hospice, clinic, refuge, care home and perhaps even sheltered accommodation.

The particular scourge of the times was leprosy, which had been brought back from the Holy Land by Crusaders and pilgrims; the disease was greatly feared since there was no cure then known; the only treatment was seclusion from the outside world. One might surmise or conjecture that this was one - perhaps the main - purpose of the hospital at Stydd.

As the Crusaders' struggle for the Holy Land was lost - Jerusalem fell to the great Muslim warrior, the Sultan Saladin in 1187 and Acre their last stronghold fell in 1291 - so soldiers and pilgrims no longer travelled to those places, where they came into contact with the disease, with the result that the incidence of the disease fell and with it the number of leprosy patients. This might – another conjecture - be the reason for the decline of the community at Stydd and the resultant need to transfer the holding on to others, thereby explaining the acquisition by the Knights Hospitallers in about 1265.

The Knight's Hospitallers

I should make clear that there is no architectural, archaeological or archival evidence to support the theory propounded by Dr Whittaker in his History of Whalley in 1801 that the foundation at Stydd was once controlled by the Knights Templars. That is one myth about this place; I will come to another later.

It is unlikely that the religious community at Stydd long survived the transfer to the Knights Hospitallers.

It is true that in 1314 one Walter de Lofthouse, a witness to a local deed, was described as being the ‘warden of St Saviour’s by Ribchester’ but this may have been merely a rank or title that he was permitted to continue to use during his lifetime, in the same way that today some retired service officers continue to use their military rank.

In 1338, the Knights Hospitallers organized a detailed inventory of their entire estates in England; by then the manor at Stydd was let as an agricultural small-holding (or ‘camera’), rent being paid to the regional headquarters (‘the Preceptory’) of the Knights Hospitallers at Newland, near Wakefield in Yorkshire, which was answerable to the national headquarters of the Order at Clerkenwell. ‘Buy to rent’ is not a new concept; the Order held the land at Stydd for the income it produced to support the work of the Order. There was no mention of any hospital or any other kind of religious community then existing on the site; if there had been, it would have been fully described. The lease of the land at Stydd did however require the tenant to maintain the chapel and to provide a chantry chaplain to say masses for the dead; the chapel itself therefore survived but the religious community had gone. It is interesting to reflect that whilst this small chapel at Stydd has survived: there is now no trace whatsoever of the Orders’ regional headquarters at Newland near Wakefield to which the rent from Stydd was paid and not much remaining at the national headquarters at Clerkenwell either, apart from a Gatehouse much reconstructed in Victorian times.

Later religious use of the building

Almost nothing is known of Stydd in the later medieval period. There is no mention or trace of any religious community continuing on the site after this deed of 1338. It is likely that the other buildings on the site gradually fell into disrepair and eventual ruin or were quarried for stone.

However, services in the chapel continued; presided over by the chaplain endowed from the rent of the manor. Furthermore, some of the furnishings of the church – in particular the font, to which I have already referred, date from this later period, which seems to me strongly to suggest that this chapel continued as a place of worship even though the Hospitallers had long since disappeared.

There had always been a burial ground surrounding the chapel. A surviving document records that in 1501 one Nicholas Talbot endowed a priest to sing for twelve months at Stydd, ‘where his

mother and father were buried’.

The dissolution of the monasteries and the sale of Stydd

Everything here at Stydd, and throughout the country, changed in the 1530s when Henry VIII, taking advantage of the religious turmoil in Europe, anxious to divorce Katherine of Aragon, who could not bear him a son, broke with Rome, declared himself to be the Supreme Governor of the Church, established by the Act of Supremacy in 1534; seeing another opportunity, dissolved and suppressed the monasteries and all every other religious order, and seized their property; in this way he took possession of all the property held by the Knights Hospitallers, including the church, the farm and the land at Stydd.

In 1543 the holding at Stydd was bought by a prosperous local landowner, Thomas Holt of Grizlehurst, near Bury, but with the condition that some small sum be paid annually towards the stipend of a chaplain at Stydd, who was charged with the duty of holding periodic services. The Holts held the manor for a hundred years and more, until his great-grandson, another Thomas Holt squandered his inheritance in the 1670s by riotous living.

In 1538, Thomas Cromwell, the King’s principal Secretary of State, required that every church should keep a register of births (or more accurately christenings), marriages and deaths (or more accurately burials) but it took a long time for this requirement to be followed in every parish. Moreover, many of the early registers have been lost, or destroyed – for the reasons I have already given. The surviving records at Ribchester date from 1598, they did sometimes record burials and occasional christenings and even a marriage ‘at Stid’, so it would appear that there was no separate register kept for Stydd. Indeed, the parish registers at Ribchester continue to record burials at Stydd right up into the late eighteenth century. The use as a burial ground was formally discontinued by an Order in Council as late as 1879.

The purchase of Stydd by Catholic gentlemen

In 1686, Stydd Manor, together with its farmland, was bought by a group – one might today call it a consortium - of local Catholic gentlemen.

Their interest may have derived from the rights of burial in the churchyard at Stydd, which accrued to the owners of the estate. Some have said their interest was that that Stydd was extra-

parochial, that is to say a place of worship outside the control of the Anglican church; I doubt this, since - as I have mentioned - baptisms, marriages and burials at Stydd were conducted according to the rites of the established church and recorded in the register at St Wilfrid's throughout this period. Furthermore, in 1717, an investigation of the property of the Church of England throughout his diocese of Chester was ordered by the Bishop; the examiners found that the Rector of Ribchester acted as parson at Stydd, although then the custom seems to have been for a separate act of institution.

The consortium of Catholic gentlemen consisted of: James Stanford, Richard and John Shireburne and their cousins Richard and John Walmsley. Let me deal with them in turn.

James Stanford and the Stanford Dole

James Stanford although then living at New Hall, just over Ribchester Bridger, in the parish of Clayton-le-Dale was not a local man; indeed he had been an influential member of the household of the catholic king James II, but there had been anti-Catholic riots in London; the Catholic church in Lime Street, with which he had been associated was attacked by rioters and burnt; he felt that London was becoming dangerous and fled north, to Lancashire, where there were many Catholic sympathisers, where he thought that he would be safer. He died in 1695, leaving money to fund a local charity for the poor, known as the 'Stanford Dole', and 'to provide for the maintenance of a good priest for ever at Stidd (sic) or Bailey Hall chapel, if times permitted that public serve could there be had'. He stipulated that the priest 'should be a very exemplary, virtuous, careful, vigilant and sufficiently learned person and that he should not be absent from his flock for above two or three days and that only upon extraordinary business'. His charity still exists; it is now run by the Catholic diocese of Salford.

His death is recorded in the Ribchester parish records: '6 December 1695 James Stanphord (sic) buried at Stid (sic)'. His grave is now unmarked.

John Sherburne and the Stydd Almshouses

I move on to the Sherburnes. There were many branches of the family, including at Stonyhurst; Richard and John Sherburne were brothers; they came from Bailey Hall, in Hurst Green, then in the parish of Mitton. I show the Hall as it is today. I will need to return to Bailey Hall, suffice it

to say that before the Reformation there was a chapel of ease there to serve the local community – of course then the local catholic community - for whom the journey to the church at Mitton, Whalley or Ribchester was just too far.

John Sherburne moved into the house at Stydd Manor. There is a weathered stone over the front door which bears the inscription: ‘Erecta’ - built by – ‘John Sherburne, 1698’.

When he died in 1726, John Sherburne, left money to endow the construction of an almshouse for the teacher at the Catholic school and ‘five poor old single women, professing the Roman Catholic religion’. The picturesque building, on the way to Stydd, with a prominent central flight of steps, sweeping up to a striking - almost baroque - arcade on the first floor, with a curved stone parapet above, was finished in 1728; it is now maintained and let by a local Housing Association, but still serving its original purpose.

The Walmsleys and Father Sir Walter Vavasour SJ of Showley Hall

The third part of this consortium were the Walmsleys of Showley Hall at Clayton-le-Dale, which still stands but it is now considerably decayed, dilapidated and nearly derelict farmhouse just off the A59.

There are many branches of the Walmsley in Lancashire but the Walmesleys of Showley Hall had a long tradition of public service and achievement. One Sir Thomas Walmesley, who was born at Showey Hall, was a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in the reign of Elizabeth 1; there are not many pubs in England named after judges, he is commemorated in by the pub in Billington on the way into Whalley and built Hacking Hall, a couple of miles upstream from here, which some of you may know.

Mass was frequently said at Showley Hall, often by Father Sir Walter Vavasour; he was a Jesuit and a hereditary baronet – rather an unusual combination.

He served the Catholic community locally, also administering communion at Hothersall Hall, at Bailey Hall, at Dinckley Hall, at Os-bald-es-tone Hall and at other houses of the local Catholic gentry

But, at least for a short time, he also conducted services at St Wilfrid’s; it is reordered in the

Parish register at St Wilfrid's: Dec 10 1705, 'Thomas, son of Robert Barton of Ribchester was 'baptised by Mr Vavisa (sic)'.

There are two similar entries of baptisms in 1706, one by a so called but unnamed 'Roman priest' and one by a so called but unnamed 'Papist priest', both might have been Father Vavasour. The performance of services by a Catholic priest in an Anglican church was highly irregular. No such baptisms are recorded thereafter; whether the practice ceased – and, if so, why - or whether it carried on and was not recorded, I cannot say.

In fact, Father Vavasour lived for another 35 years, serving the local Catholic community. He died in 1740 and was buried at Stydd; his burial is recorded in the Ribchester parish registers thus: '1740, April 12th, Walter Vaviser, a reputed Romish Priest, at Stid'. It has long been supposed that the long cross, just to the right of the altar, marks his grave.

I might add that the following year, 1741, there is a record of the burial (on Oct 25) of 'William Brewer, a Reputed Romish preist (sic) in ch[urch]', meaning in St Wilfrid's church. But I know nothing more about him. His grave is not now marked.

1743: Charles Ingolby, another Catholic priest, was buried at Stydd. His burial is recorded in Ribchester parish register in the same manner: '1743; June 6 Charles Ingleby, gent, from Sholey', with no acknowledgement of his status as a priest. His marked grave is also in the chancel.

Richard Walmsley, one of the Catholic gentry who had bought Stydd Manor and the farmland, was also buried in the chancel at Stydd in 1744.

1755, his brother Thomas, another Catholic priest was buried there beside him; his grave is inscribed in the same way: 'Thomas Walmsley, Esquire, of Sholey ... aged 75'; again, with no acknowledgment of his status as a priest. Again, the Ribchester Parish Register simply records (April 24) 'Thomas Walmsley, Esq, from Sholey, att Stid'. I observe that he was anxious that it was known that his social rank was as an esquire, a step higher than Charles Ingolby, who had been described merely as a 'gentlemen'.

Bishop Francis Petre

The year after the death of Thomas Walmsley, in 1756 the lease of Showley Hall there was taken by their kinsman Francis Petre. He had been educated in France at Douai and returned as a priest, he was then appointed as the Vicar Apostolic, effectively the bishop, for the northern counties of England and titular bishop of Amorium, an ancient Christian site in Asia minor, now in modern Turkey.

He is buried in the chancel at Stydd; the Latin inscription on his white marble tombstone may be translated thus: 'Here lies the most Illustrious and Reverend Lord Francis Petre, ... of an illustrious and ancient family in the county of Essex, ... Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District; which he governed with discernment and care for 24 years, being its patron and ornament by his kind acts and apostolic virtues; then full of days and good deeds, after bestowing many alms, he died in the Lord on the 24th December of the year 1775, aged 84. May he rest in peace.'

His burial is recorded in the Parochial records of the St Wilfrid's in this matter of fact manner: '1775, December 27, Francis Petre, Esq, Sholey, a Romish Bis'p'. It is surely remarkable - if not unique - for a Catholic bishop to be buried in an Anglican church.

There is another gravestone, marked by a simple and crudely cut cross, to which I will return, where very recently it has been suggested that one of the Catholic martyrs Margaret Clitherow rests.

Burial of Jacobite rebels

I have mentioned some burials entered in the parish registers; I might mention in passing two other very unusual entries. Following the defeat of the Jacobite rebellion in 1715 and the surrender of the rebel army in the market place at Preston, many prisoners were taken, of whom some were later tried for treason at the Assizes in Liverpool, most were convicted and sentenced to death and some were executed. I return to the Ribchester church registers: October 3, 1716: Jon Winckley, and Thomas Shuttleworth both of Alston were buried both described in the register as being 'executed for treason'. This is very unusual, since most persons executed, particularly for treason were not buried in hallowed ground, indeed their bodies were often left on gibbets, as in Gallows Lane, just over the fields from here. There is a point to this digression, aside from interest, to which I will return shortly.

The Monument at Mitton

Another digression - to which will I return - is the singular monument in the parish church at Mitton, to a relative of the Shireburns, which refers to his being 'present at the Preston affair of 1715' – a wonderful euphemism for engaging in an armed rebellion against the Crown.

The building of the Catholic Church (and the decline of St. Saviour's, Stydd)

After the bishop's death, the Walmsleys leased 13 acres of land at Stydd to Father William Fisher, formerly Bishop Petre's chaplain.

Father Fisher built Stydd Lodge in 1789, to serve as the Presbytery for the Catholic church, later called Saint Peter's and St Paul's church, which was built later the same year. It is a mark of local tolerance - and indeed the respect accorded to their Catholic neighbours - that this building was permitted fully two years before the passing of the Second Catholic Relief Act, which allowed once again the public worship of the Catholic faith. The church was extensively renovated in 1989 on the occasion of its bi-centenary. It has a large and thriving congregation.

After the building of the Catholic church in 1789, Catholic interest in the church at Stydd declined; by the mid-nineteenth century, the church was considerably decayed, the roof was unsafe and the building covered in ivy. There are picture of it in that condition in 1844 and 1853.

The position of chaplain at Stydd - and with it St Saviour's itself - was formally subsumed within the Anglican Parish of Ribchester in the 1870s; since which time the parish has been known as 'St Wilfrid, Ribchester with St Saviour, Stydd'.

Restoration of St Saviour's Stydd

The church at Stydd was extensively repaired under the leadership of the Rector Samuel Sidebottom in 1925, and again 20 or so years ago, after a suggestion that the church be declared redundant was fortunately rejected.

As most of you will know, the traditional of worship at Stydd continues: services are still held here at Easter, Christmas, Harvest, once a month during the summer and on some other occasions. In recent years, there have also been baptisms, services of blessing and I think also weddings, held by special licence.

The life of Margaret Clitherow

I have mentioned one myth concerning the church, let me turn to what I consider to be another; the suggestion that the Catholic martyr Margaret Clitherow was buried here. Let me first tell her story.

Margaret Clitherow, the ‘Pearl of York’ was born in York in 1556, the daughter of Thomas Middleton, a prominent merchant in that city, who became Sheriff in 1564.

In 1571 she married John Clitherow, a well-to-do butcher, but not in the sense of being a mere butcher, baker or candle-stick maker, he was in a serious way of business. There is no contemporaneous portrait of her but she is commonly represented as a typically pious provincial lady of the Elizabethan merchant class. There is a statue of her in her shrine on the Shambles in York; there are a couple of stained-glass representations (one in St Peter and St Paul’s Catholic Church).

Her brother in law, William Clitherow was a Catholic priest, and through his influence she converted. Her son went abroad to become a Catholic priest; her daughter became a nun. She gave shelter to the succession of Catholic priests in her house on the Shambles in York. In March 1586, she was arrested, a priests’ hole was found in the house and she was charged with having harboured and maintained Jesuits and with having permitted Mass to be said at her house, which was a capital charge under an Act passed in 1584. Following conviction for such an offence, the subject’s goods were forfeited to the Crown and further penalties could be levied upon the family.

The death of Margaret Clitherow

However, when arraigned at York Assizes, Margaret Clitherow refused to plead to the charge. Without entering a plea there could be no trial, if there was no trial her family would not be required to give evidence (thereby exposing themselves to the risk of self-incrimination) and without a trial there could be no conviction and the consequences of conviction to her family were avoided. Following the barbaric practice of the time, she was ordered to be pressed until she entered a plea or until she died. The process of pressing required the subject to be stripped, tied down with arms and legs outstretched, a sharp stone placed under the back, a board was then

placed upon the body and weight gradually placed upon the board, until the ribs broke and the sufferer was crushed to death. This practice was not abolished in England until 1775, when an Act of Parliament provided that anyone who failed to plead should be regarded as being convicted. Later this was changed to being found 'mute by malice' and a plea of not guilty was entered on their behalf.

Interestingly, the procedure of pressing someone who refused to plead, was only once used in America upon one of those suspected of witchcraft at Salem, Massachusetts. The general disgust and outrage at this practice was one of the reasons why the Founding Fathers outlawed 'cruel and unusual punishments' in the American Constitution.

Back to Margaret Clitherow, following her refusal to plead, she was pressed to death in public on the Tolbooth Bridge over the River Ouse at York on 25 March – Lady Day 1586, which was also Good Friday.

As she was being pressed to death, the sheriff urged her to confess and to remember that she died for treason, to which she is alleged to have replied that he was wrong and that she died for the love of the Lord Jesu. Her last words were said to be: 'Jesu; have mercy upon my soul'.

Persons executed were not usually accorded a Christian burial; some accounts suggest that her body was then thrown onto a spoil heap - or even a dung heap. A contemporary account, attributed to Father John Mush, a Catholic priest, reported that after lying there for some six weeks, Catholic sympathisers, found the body after a long search and secretly took it away 'on horseback a long journey', after which it was 'laid up as a worthy treasure until God redeem us'. Other contemporary sources tell a similar story but I observe - and I stress - that not one describes – still less identifies - the burial site.

Margaret Clitherow was always revered as a Catholic martyr. She was beatified in 1929 and canonised by Pope Paul VI as one of the Forty English Catholic Martyrs in 1970. A plain and unprepossessing plaque was recently erected on the Ouse Bridge in York to commemorate the event.

I am very keen to point out that nothing I say is intended to diminish the virtues, the courage - or indeed the saintliness - of Margaret Clitherow, or the value of her life as an example to others.

But I will try to set out the evidence – such as it is – that she now lies in the church at Stydd.

The crypt at Bailey Hall

Let me return to Bailey Hall, the home of one branch of the Shireburn family. There had long been a small chapel there; the evidence strongly suggests Catholic services were illegally held there after the Reformation.

The Shireburns continued to own Bailey Hall. Sir Nicholas Shireburn of Stonyhurst gave active encouragement to the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, indeed a party of rebels, including his cousin Richard Shireburn of Bailey Hall met at Stonyhurst before joining the Pretender's forces at Preston, where they were surrounded, and surrendered. Somehow Richard Shireburn escaped capture but he was outlawed for high treason and his estates were forfeit; Bailey Hall was sold.

It passed through many hands, until in 1831 it was bought by Joseph Fenton, a banker from Rochdale, who had bought the Dutton Manor estate.

In 1853, a correspondent wrote that the old chantry chapel at Bailey Hall was 'barbarously destroyed by order of Mr Fenton of Rochdale about 20 years ago'.

The third edition of Dr Whittaker's scholarly History of Deanery of Craven, written in 1875, described the chapel at Bailey Hall in these terms: 'The chapel, with a vault, probably intended for the internment of the founder's family, remained till within memory, when it was destroyed, excepting the ramified east window which was removed to Stonyhurst ...'. You will note that he makes no mention of Margaret Clitherow being buried there.

In 1913, the chapel, and more particularly, the crypt, were excavated by Father Charles Newdigate, a Jesuit scholar and one of the greatest authorities on the English martyrs. He was at the time, a master at Stonyhurst College. He wrote of his finds in the Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Historical Society. Under much rubble, he found some steps leading down to the vault. This too was filled with rubble, which he carefully removed. Beneath the accumulated rubbish, he came across some human remains: 'the bones were not lying in situ as when buried, but have evidentially been previously disturbed' there was no sign of coffins, which would long since have rotted away. He showed the remains to a doctor, who was able to say that they were the bones of five adults, one of whom was a man but he could not say anything more.

The bones were re-buried in consecrated ground in the churchyard at Stonyhurst, with the inscription ‘the remains of some of our Catholic forefathers’.

I have dealt with this at some length, because he – the great authority on the English martyrs - never for one moment thought that he had been excavating where the remains of Margaret Clitherow had been laid.

The hypothesis

Now I come to Miss Katharine Longley, an archivist by profession. She wrote a life of Margaret Clitherow in 1966, using the nom de plume Mary Claridge. The book extends to 200 pages, it details the martyr’s life and holds her up as an example of faithfulness, being very much – she says ‘Saint for our times’. She described her martyrdom but – significantly, as I would suggest – she then said nothing whatsoever of the discovery and retrieval of her body by Catholic sympathisers, let alone did she then venture to suggest where they had taken the body to a secret burial.

However, some years later she came up with a new idea – she called it ‘an hypothesis’ - which she set out in an article ‘The lost body of St Margaret Clitherow’, by Katherine Longley, published in the records of the Northern Catholic History, Spring 1990 edition. I will summarise this hypothesis.

Since a small crypt had been found during the excavations at Bailey Hall in 1913, and since Bailey Hall was owned by a junior branch of the Shireburn family of Stonyhurst, and since they were always strong Catholics and since another local Catholic was William Hawksworth, and since he had estates at Mitton and elsewhere in Yorkshire and since he had relatives in York, Miss Longley suggests that Hawksworth might have arranged the body of Margaret Clitheroe to be taken from York to Bailey Hall.

It seems to me that there is in reality not a single piece of real or documentary evidence to suggest that this was ever done. It is pure speculation.

Even if her body was found by sympathisers, and even if they took the body away to give it a

decent burial, why you may ask should they take the extraordinary and unnecessary risk to take the body all the way from York to Hurst Green, why not bury her on the land of some more local Catholic sympathisers.

If she had been buried in a crypt at Bailey Hall, would not some discrete memorial or shrine or inscription have been erected to her there.

Furthermore, would there not be some documentary record of the fact - and there is none.

And if there was any truth in any of this, would not Father Newdigate have discovered it – or at least suspected it - during his excavations.

Her surmise and conjecture does not end there, because she has to get the body from Bailey Hall to Stydd. So, she developed another series of hypotheses: since another branch of the Shireburn family had land at Stydd; and since the Shireburns of Hurst Green were ‘out’ in the Jacobite rebellion of 1715, and since they were attainted and their land was forfeit to the Crown; and since the family might have been anxious to move the martyr’s body from Bailey Hall before the forfeiture took effect. She points out that Catholic priests were buried at Stydd; a Catholic bishop was buried here, Jacobite rebels were buried at St Wilfrid’s: therefore, she suggests they might have moved her body from Bailey hall to Stydd. If they did so, she surmises they might have marked her grave with the crudely fashioned cross, which I have already shown.

Again, there is, it seems to me, not one single scrap of evidence to support this hypothesis either.

Her conjecture, which presupposes that her body was taken to Bailey Hall in the first place, also presupposes that the secret of her burial had been passed down the family from 1586 to 1715, apparently without there being a single documentary reference to the fact.

Lawyers are suspicious of hearsay evidence, what one person says another said should be treated with caution. The party game of Chinese whispers demonstrates this very clearly. Here we have Chinese whispers passing information down fully 125 years, from 1586 only by word of mouth, to pin point her burial at Bailey Hall; that takes us from her death to her supposed removal to Stydd in 1715.

Nor is this all because this supposed burial at Stydd in 1715 is not recorded either. The Jacobite rebels hanged for treason were buried in the churchyard, and their burial is recorded in the

church register as I have mentioned. A rebel present at Preston was even commemorated in Mitton Church. The burial of the Catholic priests at Stydd, to which I have referred, was not clandestine; they are recorded in the parish registers, as I have said; their graves are marked with detailed inscriptions. So why is there no mention of the burial of the remains of Margaret Clitherow?

I point out that there is no mention of the burial of Margaret Clitherow at Bailey Hall, or the removal of her body to Stydd, in any of the recognised scholarly works referring to the history of the chapel at Stydd. It is not mentioned by Dr Whittaker in his history of Whalley, which described Bailey hall and its chapel in detail. It is not mentioned by George Latham who wrote an account of Stydd church in 1853. It is not mentioned by Smith in his History of Longridge in 1888. It is not mentioned by Smith and Shortt in their history of Ribchester, published in 1890. It is not recognised by the highly authoritative Victoria County History of Lancashire. It is not even recognised by any of the mainstream histories of the English Catholic martyrs. Indeed, there is no mention of this at all until Miss Longley came up with this hypothesis in 1990. So, we have another 250 years, from 1715 to 1990 without a single piece of written evidence to support this hypothesis.

If one goes to the Margaret Clitherow Shrine in York, there is no mention of this supposed burial at Bailey Hall or the transfer of the body to Stydd. The priest in charge of the shrine – to whom I have spoken politely describes this hypothesis as ‘very controversial’. The indeed the official handout there spells out in terms: ‘the whereabouts of her body is unknown.

Indeed, there is at her shrine in York a belief that the martyr’s hand, is held as a holy relic in the Bar Convent at York. If one makes the leap of faith that they are right about that, there is another rather serious problem with reconciling that legend with Miss Longley’s hypothesis that the rest of her body is at Stydd: was the hand found separately from the body and, if so, how did that come about? The only other logical explanation would be the very ghoulish idea that the body was found and the hand chopped off and kept at York and the rest send by cart to Bailey Hall. That is not an idea which you are likely to find credible.

My conclusion is that there is not a shred of evidence that the body of Margaret Clitherow was found and taken to be buried at Bailey Hall or that it was later removed to Stydd. The belief – the

hypothesis - that she is buried there is a modern myth. I can hardly describe it as a modern urban myth; I call it a modern rural myth, which seems to have a persistent but – I suggest - unconvincing fascination. The church of St. Saviour's, Stydd has many genuinely interesting features, which I commend to you, but being the burial place of Margaret Clitherow is not one of them.

As I have already said, I do not wish or intend to diminish the virtues, the courage - or indeed the saintliness - of Margaret Clitherow, or the value of her life as an example to others. I do however suggest that there is no reason to think that her poor and mangled body was ever at Bailey Hall, or lies now at Stydd.

You must come to your own conclusions – as I have come to mine.

Bibliography

'The History of Stydd Chapel and Preceptory' by George Latham (1853) has some interesting plans and line drawings (but there is little of value in the text).

There is a chapter on 'The extra-parochial chapelry of Stydd' in 'The History of Ribchester' by Tom Smith and the Rev Jonathan Shortt, Vicar of Hoghton (1890), which has a detailed examination of the early manorial history.

There is a detailed description of the fabric of the building in 'The Victoria County History of Lancashire, Volume VI', which has a summary of the manorial history.

A 'Brief History of Stydd Church' (1986, with revisions 1987), a booklet privately printed and published by the authors CJ Ward, PG Dixon and JL Dixon provides an introduction to the topic, with an examination of the archaeological excavations.

The excavations by Stonyhurst College in 1913 are described in the Stonyhurst Magazine for 1915.

The excavations at Stydd in the 1970s are described in a pamphlet 'St Saviour, Stydd' by Ben Edwards FSA, then the County Archaeologist, who supervised the dig.

The standard guides "The Story of The Parish Church of St Wilfrid's, Ribchester" by The Rev

Samuel Sidebotham (1925) and 'A Goodly Heritage' (revised 1984) by the Rev JH Finch (both Rectors of Ribchester) have short passages on St Saviour's, Stydd.

An excellent guide, 'SS. Peter and Paul Church, Ribchester', was produced by Father S. Horgan to mark the bicentenary of that church in 1989.

The life of Margaret Clitherow and the hypothesis that she is buried at Stydd are summarised in an article 'The lost body of St Margaret Clitherow', by Katherine Longley, in the records of the Northern Catholic History, Spring 1990 edition. Further detail of the martyr's life is provided in her book: 'Margaret Clitherow' (written under the pseudonym 'Mary Claridge') published by the Fordham University Press, New York, 1966.