

Margaret Clitherow

Born 1556:

Margaret Clitherow was the daughter of Jen and Thomas Middleton, a wax chandler who had been Sheriff of York from 1564 to 1565. She married John Clitherow, a wealthy butcher and chamberlain of the city, in St. Martin's Church, on the 8th July 1571. They lived in The Shambles in York. Although her husband had been born into a Catholic family and had a priest for a brother; he conformed to the authorised Church, in which Margaret herself had been



brought-up. Margaret converted to the Catholic faith *circa* 1574. Margaret kept a room adjoining her house and another elsewhere in York especially for Mass and the safety of Catholic priests. She employed a Catholic schoolmaster for her family and friends. During the course of twelve years she was arrested several times and imprisoned for a total of three years. One of the pupils at the school was eventually coerced into revealing the priests' hiding-place. On 14th March 1586, Margaret was brought in front of the judge, but fearful for her servants and children; she refused to plead. In the absence of a plea, the Judge was obliged to condemn her by '*Peine forte et dure*', saying ' You must be stripped naked, laid down, your back upon the ground, and as much weight laid on you as you are able to bear, and so continue for three days without meat or drink, except a little barley bread and puddle water, and the third day be pressed to death, your hands and feet tied to posts and a sharp stone under your back'. "God be thanked, I am not worthy of so good a death as this", she said. The three-day sentence was not carried out, but she was pressed to death on Lady Day, 25th March 1586. She walked barefoot to the Tolbooth on Ouse Bridge, having sent her shoes to her daughter Anne. She lay beneath a board loaded with rocks for fifteen minutes before she died. Her last words were "Jesu! Jesu! Jesu! Have mercy on me!"

Her sons Henry and William became priests; her daughter Anne a nun at St. Ursula's Convent, Louvain (Leuven). Her right hand is preserved at St. Mary's Convent in York and she is remembered as 'The Pearl of York'.