

Mount Grace - the Mary Ward Connection with the Lady Chapel

On May 22nd this year, there will be a pilgrimage from the village of Osmotherley to the Lady Chapel (2 mile uphill walk) in thanksgiving for Mary Ward and all the favours her sisters have received from God in the last 400 years.

For more information please contact Sister Mary Walmsley at the Bar Convent York Tel: 01904 464919 or email her at marywalmsley.cj@bar-convent.org.uk.



Mary Ward (1585 – 1645), Foundress of the religious order now known as the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and recently promulgated as Venerable by the Church, was born and brought up in Yorkshire – both in the North Riding on the Newby Hall estate near Ripon and in East Yorkshire with her grandparents near Welwick, on Holderness. She, with a small group of young companions, following a serious call from God, went on to the Continent to found her religious order in 1609. She saw the needs of the times as first and foremost being the education of women, particularly English Catholic girls unable to be educated in their own country because of the persecution of Catholics still in force, and the pastoral care of adults. Her schools flourished and the ranks of sisters expanded till in 1631 she was imprisoned for being too ahead of her times in her wish for non enclosure and government from within her order. Schools and convents closed and many sisters returned to their families. By 1640, she was back in England, in secret with a few faithful sisters. She was far from well, suffering from kidney stones and severe swelling to her knee. In 1642, Mary Ward and a few sisters were living in the small village of Hutton Rudby, near Northallerton in North Yorkshire while the Civil War raged around her.

This account was recorded by Winifred Wigmore, one of her companions:

Arrived there at the Exaltation of the Holy Cross 1642, her first care was to find a convenient place for a chapel where the Blessed Sacrament was kept continually, with a light burning and the Altar so adorned as moved all to reverence and devotion that beheld it, and it was in fine and exceeding consolation to all the poore Catholics about. About the middle of October she fell very Sicke as her life was held in great danger and her recovery attributed to a pilgrimage made for her to the above said Mountgrace, a place to this day of great devotion and where many graces are granted, though so destroyed and defaced and only the bare four walls remaine without rooffe or cover, and in regard to the great height of the Mountayne on which it stands exposed to very great winds. Yet shall you find Catholics praying there howers together, and this Pilgrimage herself made when recovered from the above sayd sickness.

The Lady Chapel has been a place of pilgrimage to this day and is now the Diocesan Shrine for the Diocese of Middlesbrough. A full account of the History of the Lady Chapel was written by Fr Anthony Storey and published in 2001.