The life story of **Margaret Clitherow**, is at once ordinary and extraordinary. She was born in Middleton, England, in 1555, of protestant parents. Possessed of good looks and full of wit and merriment, she was a charming personality. In 1571, she married (arranged) John Clitherow, a well-to-do grazier and butcher (to whom she bore two children). They lived in 'The Shambles'.

Shortly after her marriage, Margaret converted to Catholicism. Her husband remained a Protestant, but was not hostile to his wife's religion. He paid her fines for not attending Protestant church services and looked the other way when she sheltered priests in their home and educated their children in Catholicism.

The Clitherow home soon became one of the main places of refuge for fugitive priests in England. Margaret had a secret cupboard with vestments, wine and bread for Mass, as well as a "priest's hole" to hide the cleric himself.

In 1586, there was a crackdown on remnants of Catholicism in the North. John Clitherow was summoned and asked about the whereabouts of his son, who was studying abroad to become a Catholic priest. He angrily refused to give any information. The Clitherow home was searched, but, as usual, the priest had left through a window and the authorities found only a small group of children at ordinary lessons.

Unfortunately, however, among the group was a Flemish child whose fear of the authorities showed on his face. They seized him and threatened him with a flogging; he immediately told them everything he knew about Mrs. Clitherow's Catholic activities and even showed them the secret cupboard.

Margaret was imprisoned (not for the first time), and shared a cell with a friend who had been arrested for hearing Mass. Her children were taken to live with a Protestant family and she did not see them again. Her husband was allowed to visit her once, in the presence of a jailer.

On March 14, 1586, Margaret Clitherow's case came before the court. As a large crowd gathered outside, she was asked for her plea. She replied, "I know of no offense whereof I should confess myself guilty. Having made no offense, I need no trial." The penalty for refusing

to plea was extremely harsh and many begged her to change her mind, but she refused to allow a trial at which her children would be forced to testify against her.

The judge pronounced Margaret guilty of having "harbored and maintained Jesuits and seminary priests, traitors to the Queen's majesty and her laws." Because she refused to stand trial, the penalty was death by crushing. She was told,

Ten days later, the sentence was carried out. A board was placed on her and huge stones were laid on top. She was dead within 15 minutes.

In 1970, Margaret was made a saint by Pope Paul VI, who called her "the Pearl of York." She was one of 40 new saints of England and Wales canonized in that year. **St. Margaret is the patron saint of the Catholic Women's League,** who provided the plaque that tells her life story in the shrine.

A sacred site in York that might be easily missed is the **Shrine of St. Margaret Clitherow**, located in a small medieval house on The Shambles. St. Margaret met a rather gruesome martyrdom in 1586 for being a Catholic in a newly Protestant England.

The shrine consists of a single, small room in a house off the famous medieval street known as The Shambles. A plaque on the wall explains Margaret's story and there is a statue of her and a priest behind an altar at the front. *(See photo next page).*

The Margaret Clitherow Shrine is an important site for Catholic pilgrims. For other visitors, it is a good chance to look inside a medieval house and learn the story of a rather remarkable English housewife.

The story of St. Margaret's martyrdom can also be seen in stained glass at the church of Our Lady and the English Martyrs in Cambridge. The elaborate memorial of Sir John Clenche, the judge who sentenced Margaret to death, is in the Church of All Saints in Holbrook, Suffolk.

Photos: Anne Lumb from a previous trip to York to visit the Shrine