

CHAPEL LANE
NETHERTON
MERSEYSIDE L30 7PE

HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST

TRADITION: ROMAN CATHOLIC

BUILT: 1792-3

CONGREGATION ACTIVE
UNTIL: 1975

LISTING: GRADE II*

OS GRID REFERENCE:
SD358002

SIMPLE CHAPEL BUILT 1793
AFTER THE LEGALISATION OF
CATHOLIC WORSHIP

ST BENET'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHAPEL



TRANSPORT

The chapel is diagonally opposite the new Roman Catholic church in Netherton, which is at the northern edge of the Merseyside conurbation, just south of the A5207, Northern Perimeter Road, near Sefton.

VISIT US

The chapel is closed for self-guided visits, but group visits are possible by prior arrangement: chapels@hct.org.uk. No toilet facilities on site.

Please note the Presbytery and garden is now a private residence with no access.



William Molyneux, 4th Viscount (1655-1717)

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

An important and well-preserved example of an early Catholic church, St Benet's Chapel was built in 1792-3, immediately after the second Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1791 came into force. The relief acts allowed Catholics to worship freely, hold positions of legal authority and attend Catholic schools. However, all Catholics were required swear an oath to uphold the Protestant succession to the British throne, while priests had to be registered, and were forbidden from wearing their vestments or preaching outdoors – something nonconformists often did. Catholic places of worship had to be registered, and assemblies behind locked doors were forbidden, as were bells and steeples.

Catholicism had maintained strong roots in Netherton as a result of the protection provided by the Roman Catholic Molyneux family. The local Catholics worshipped in the Molyneux private chapel, which remained legal on the basis that it was not a public place of worship and that those attending mass were guests. However, the local congregation was compelled to find a new place of worship when the 8th Viscount Molyneux renounced his Catholicism, adopted the Established church and, shortly afterwards, was created Earl of Sefton in 1769.

A Benedictine monk by the name of Father Gregory set about raising funds for a new chapel, and by 1792, having raised enough money from the local community and the Benedictine order, Father Gregory obtained permission to build a priest's house and chapel in Netherton. Given its construction so shortly after the Relief Act 1791, it is clear that the Catholic community were still wary of persecution, as the church is not obviously a place of worship and almost concealed behind the presbytery. By 1888 the congregation was in decline, numbering only 68, down from 160 in 1800. The chapel later saw a resurgence in the twentieth century as Liverpool expanded into its hinterland – by the 1950s St Benet's was so popular nine masses were being said there every Sunday.

One of the best preserved examples of a pre-Emancipation Catholic chapel in the North West.

~ The Buildings of England (Pevsner), Liverpool & Lancashire South West

HCT HAS RAISED GRANTS AND DONATIONS OF OVER £250,000 SO FAR TO REPAIR THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPEL AND THE PRESBYTERY

To find out more visit www.hct.org.uk or contact chapels@hct.org.uk

THE HISTORIC CHAPELS TRUST | ST. GEORGE'S GERMAN LUTHERAN CHURCH,
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THE EXTERIOR

The church is not obviously visible from the road, and more resembles a hall or barn than a chapel. Built of handmade brick, sourced from nearby Little Crosby, the chapel's main concession to convention is its bellcote, although it was not until 1847 that a bell was installed.

*Above: decoration behind the altar.
Below: Painted glass windows.*



THE INTERIOR

The chapel has four round-headed Georgian sash windows, two on each side. Inside, against the bottom halves of the glass hang eight panels of painted glass, recently reinstalled in the chapel following restoration.

The north-west windows depict scenes from the life of Christ, the north-east windows show Christ with the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary, and the south-east window contains images of the Ascension and the Deposition (the removal of Christ from the cross). The images are painted onto 'German sheet glass', which was only available from the continent up until 1832. It is hoped to return some of the Stations of the Cross, the whereabouts of which have been traced.

The altar dates from the early nineteenth century and the decoration behind is a simple version of decoration typical of this period: winged cherubs, a 'Gloria' of heavenly rays and neo-classical urns and garlands.

The altar rail is decorated with the Lancashire rose. It is recorded by Fr. Abram, a priest of St. Benet's, that there had been a society set up to raise money for the upkeep of the altar. This society was later disbanded when one of its members absconded to Australia with the £3 raised.

On the east wall, open curtains reveal Glorias and cherubs, beneath which is an altar painting of the pieta (The Virgin Mary cradling the body of Christ).

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

In 1995 the chapel passed into the care of the Historic Chapels Trust which has since completed three phases of repair works, including constructing two buttresses to the North elevation to stabilise the structure. The former presbytery was restored in 2004. To achieve this, the Historic Chapels Trust has raised over £225,000 in grants from English Heritage and foundations. Substantial sums need to be raised to complete the restoration. The interior of the chapel was damaged before its acquisition by the Historic Chapels Trust, hence its condition in 2012: stable and weathertight, but still lacking much of its décor and furnishings.

FURTHER READING

'Church of St Benet and Chapel House',
English Heritage List Entry 1075849.