

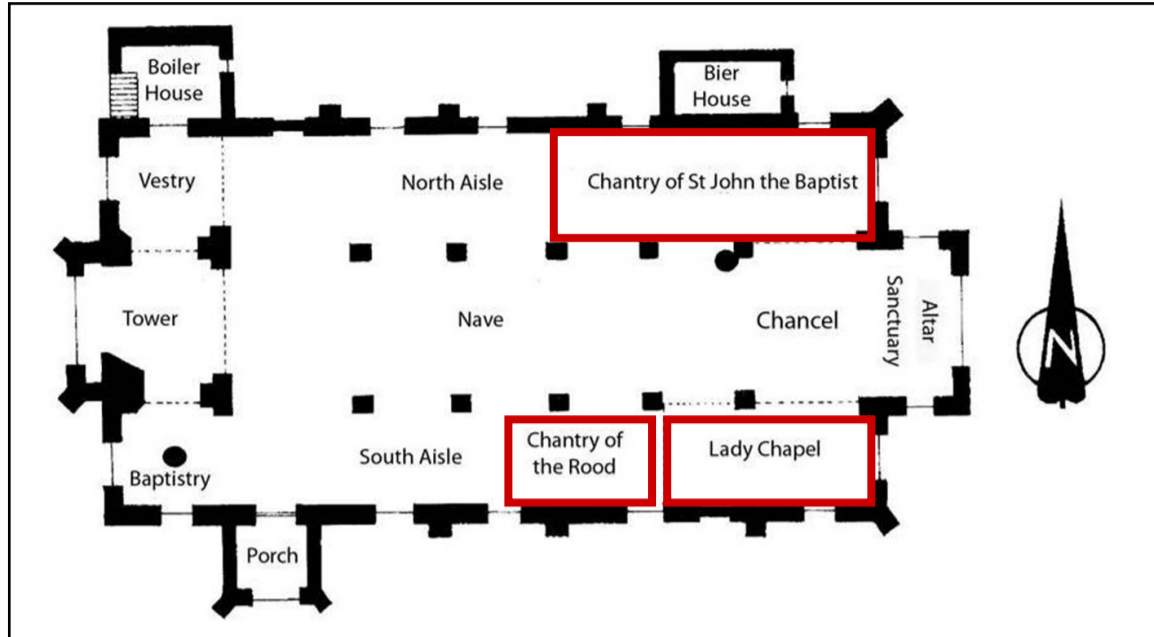
St. Michael the Archangel, Kirkby in Malhamdale

The Chantries of Kirkby Malham Church



Piscina

Chantry of Our Lady



Piscina

Chantry of The Rood

Kirkby Malham Church is believed to have had three chantries in the positions shown on the above plan, The Chantry of St John the Baptist, The Chantry of the Rood, and The Chantry of Our Lady, now known as The Lady Chapel.

A chantry is a designated area within a church, or sometimes a separate building, where in pre-reformation times a priest, the chantry priest, would say prayers and in particular perform masses for the souls of the dead. The medieval church believed that after death the soul would pass through a state of purgatory where through pain and suffering it was cleansed (or purged) of the sins committed in life and so prepared for eternal life. The belief also grew that the time spent in purgatory could be shortened by the prayers and charitable deeds of the living done in the name of the deceased. Thus individuals or families would endow money or lands to provide a chantry and pay a chantry priest to pray and perform masses for them and often also their descendants after their deaths. Strictly speaking the word 'chantry' describes the chanting of the mass and what we now call Chantries should be called Chantry Chapels.

The concept of purgatory was not part of the theology of the Anglican Church after the Reformation and chantries were abolished by two Abolition of Chantries Acts, the first in 1545 at the behest of Henry VIII and the second in 1547 at the behest of his son Edward VI. These Acts required that the crown had to provide pensions to all the chantry priests made redundant by the closure of their chantry and also specified that the money generated was to be used for charitable purposes or the public good, but most of it seems to have gone to the king or friends of the crown. Commissioners were appointed to assess the assets of the chantries in terms of their endowments, any land, and any silver or gold communion vessels. It is from the reports of these commissioners that we know something of the chantries of this church. This church was rebuilt towards the end of the 15th century and the chantries would all, almost certainly, have originally been in the old church and then incorporated into the new building.

The Chantry of St John the Baptist

The priest here in the 1540s was Thomas Cooke. He received £4 per annum from payments made by John Tempest, Knight, to pray for his father Sir Piers Tempest who fought with Henry V in France and is presumed to have died at Aginourt. He received a further £4 to say masses for a John Mallome on five days a week and on two days a week for a William Calton who it is believed died in 1400. The head of a doorway through which the priest would have entered the chantry can be seen projecting above the Jacobean pews. There are indications from the stonework on the outside of the church there that there was a small building or cell in which the Chantry Priest would have lived.



Head of Priests' Doorway

The Chantry of Our Lady

This is the chantry we know least about. It was perhaps the first as intercessions by The Virgin Mary were believed to be the most effective in easing the soul's passage through purgatory and therefore the first chantry would be quite likely to have been dedicated to her. In the commissioners Chantry Certificate they name Thomas Cooke again as priest along with a Richard Somerskale. Cooke was granted a pension of sixtysix shillings and eight pence but no mention is made of a pension for Somerskale. The piscina into which the priests would have poured the washings from the communion vessels after the mass is still there. (see picture above)

The Chantry of the Rood

This was so named because it was adjacent to the Rood, or crucifix, that would have been positioned at that position in the church, probably on top of a rood screen separating the nave from the chancel. There is a pulley in the mouth of the carved head on the beam there that would have carried a cord supporting a veil placed over the rood during Lent. The certificate of the Commissioners states: *The Chantry of the Rood there; Richard Carre incumbent there; Freehold 4d; Copyhold Nil. Memorandum that the incumbent of the said Rood Chantry being well learned and licensed to preach kept a grammar school there, which is necessary to continue with the said revenue or other stipend for the good education of the abundant youth in these rude parts.*

The presence of a grammar school in the chantry ties in with the adjacent pillar niche believed to have held a statue of St Nicholas, the patron saint of children. In 1606 a new Kirkby Malham Free Grammar School in a small building between the church and vicarage was endowed that continued until 1872.