

The Church in Liverpool

Session 2



Sefton Church

St Helen's, Sefton

- St Helen's Church was the mother church to 10 parishes north of Walton.
- There may have been a pre-existing pagan worship site here.
- This is suggested by the oval boundary of the church yard and the existence of St Helen's Well.



St Helen's, Sefton

- St Helen's Well was probably a pre-Christian spring.
- In the Middle Ages this turned into a pilgrimage site, especially so in the 14th century when the church was built close by.
- This well was once in great repute for curing rheumatism, strains, bruises and weaknesses of the nerves.
- It has no mineral quality.
- Its principal virtue seems to have been its coldness.
- A handle was on the side of the well at one time to enable people to drink the water.



St Helen's, Sefton

- In different times great respect was paid to wells eminent for curing distempers upon the Saint's Day whose name the well bore.
- It was once the custom to decorate the wells on Holy Thursday with boughs of trees, garlands of flowers, etc.
- Young people used to drop pins in the well to find out whether or not they were likely to get married.
- If the pin dropped near the church marriage was likely.



St Helen's, Sefton

- A small, decorated chapel in the Norman architectural style is known to have existed by 1291 when the building's worth was estimated at £26 19s 4d.
- No part of this original chapel exists today.
- During building works at the East Window in the early 2000s, substantial Norman floor tiles were discovered and are now displayed in the Lady Chapel.



St Helen's, Sefton

- The main body of the nave dates from around 1320.
- This incorporated a small nave with pointed, geometric tracery windows and pitched roofline.
- The 15th century saw extensions, mainly to the northern aisle.
- Evidence of this can be seen in the West window of the north aisle, which is curvilinear in style and shape, and postdates the 14th-century structure.



St Helen's, Sefton

- The whole church was rebuilt in the early 16th century.
- The 14th-century tower was retained, but everything else was removed and a traditional Tudor church in the Perpendicular style was built.
- This incorporated a new nave and chancel with a clerestory, side aisles and chapels to the north and south, a two-storey porch to the south and small vestry to the east.
- The north chapel is the Lady Chapel, and the south chapel, now known as the Molyneux Chapel, was once the Chantry of St Mary.



St Helen's, Sefton

- The vast majority of the church as seen from the south elevation is of new stone dating from this rebuild in the 1530s.
- However, the east bay of the north aisle uses stonework dating from the 14th century, and the west bay from the 15th century.
- This suggests that much of the masonry of the earlier structure was incorporated into the new Tudor building.



St Helen's, Sefton

- It was one of the centres of the Molyneux family.
- Their moated hall stood nearby.
- Several members of the family acted as rectors.
- Of the earlier rectors little is known.
- Dr. Anthony Molyneux, 1536–57, was the most distinguished.



St Helen's, Sefton

- In 1541, in addition to the rector and two chantry priests, there were only two others recorded in the parish, Hugh Whitfield and Robert Ballard, paid respectively by the rector and Sir William Molyneux.
- Eight clergy appeared at the visitation in 1548.
- Besides the parish church there was the chapel at Great Crosby to be served.



St Helen's, Sefton

- With the Reformation, St Helen's became an Anglican Church.
- During the Civil War, the Parliamentary Commissioners in 1650 were satisfied with the two ministers they found in the parish, but recommended that two more churches should be erected, one at Ince Blundell and the other at Litherland:
 - *'both places being well situated for conveniency of many inhabitants and distant from any church or chapel two miles and upwards, the want of such churches being the cause of loitering and much ignorance and popery.'*



St Helen's, Sefton

- No steps, however, seem to have been taken to build the new churches.
- Bishop Gastrell found that there were 310 families in the parish in 1718, and 156 'Papists,' with two chapels.





The Reformation

The Reformation

- The Protestant Reformation was the 16th-century religious, political, intellectual and cultural upheaval that splintered Catholic Europe.
- Historians usually date the start of the Protestant Reformation to the 1517 publication of Martin Luther's "95 Theses."



The Reformation

- Martin Luther (1483-1546) was an Augustinian monk and university lecturer in Wittenberg when he composed his “95 Theses,.”
- These protested against the pope’s sale of reprieves from penance, or indulgences.
- Luther hoped to spur renewal from within the church but in 1521 he was summoned before the Diet of Worms and excommunicated.
- Sheltered by Friedrich, elector of Saxony, Luther translated the Bible into German and continued his output of vernacular pamphlets.



The Reformation

- In 1524 German peasants, inspired in part by Luther's empowering "priesthood of all believers," revolted.
- Luther sided with Germany's princes.
- By the Reformation's end, Lutheranism had become the state religion throughout much of Germany, Scandinavia and the Baltics.



The Reformation

- The Swiss Reformation began in 1519 with the sermons of Ulrich Zwingli, whose teachings largely paralleled Luther's.
- In 1541 John Calvin, a French Protestant, was invited to settle in Geneva and put his Reformed doctrine—which stressed God's power and humanity's predestined fate—into practice.
- Calvin had spent the previous decade in exile writing his "Institutes of the Christian Religion,"
- The result was a theocratic regime of enforced, austere morality.



The Reformation

- Calvin's Geneva became a hotbed for Protestant exiles.
- His doctrines quickly spread to Scotland, France, Transylvania and the Low Countries.
- Dutch Calvinism became a religious and economic force for the next 400 years.



The Reformation

- In England, the Reformation began with Henry VIII's quest for a male heir.
- Henry had previously been an ardent opponent of Protestantism.
- Pope Clement VII refused to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine of Aragon so he could remarry.
- The English king declared in 1534 that he alone should be the final authority in matters relating to the English church.



The Reformation

- Henry dissolved England's monasteries to confiscate their wealth and worked to place the Bible in the hands of the people.
- Beginning in 1536, every parish was required to have a copy.



The Reformation

- After Henry's death, England tilted toward Calvinist-infused Protestantism during Edward VI's six-year reign.
- The country then endured five years of reactionary Catholicism under Mary I.
- In 1559 Elizabeth I took the throne and, during her 44-year reign, cast the Church of England as a "middle way" between Calvinism and Catholicism, with vernacular worship and a revised Book of Common Prayer.





Monastic Foundations

Monastic Foundations

- On the eve of the Reformation there were two monastic foundations on Merseyside.
 - Birkenhead Priory
 - Hilbre Island Monastery
- There may have been another monastery in Bromborough but this was destroyed during the times of the



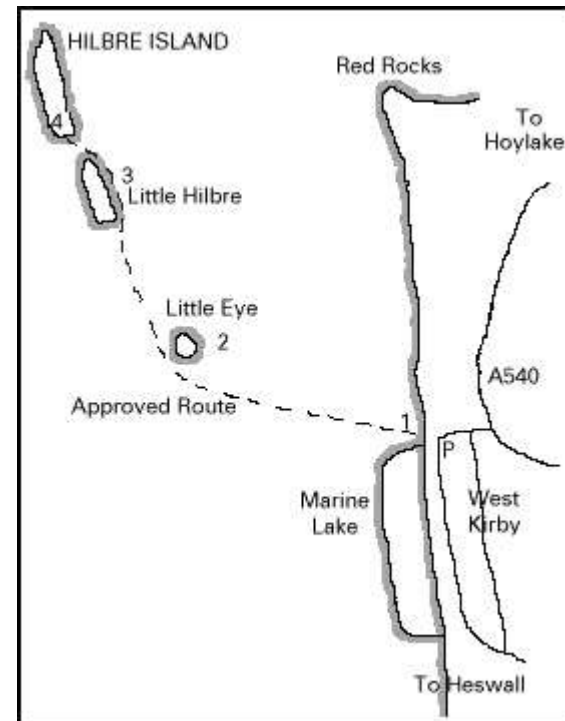
Monastic Foundations

- Hilbre Island's name derives from the dedication of the medieval chapel to St. Hildeburgh.
- She was an Anglo-Saxon holy woman.
- The names was from Hildeburgheye or Hildeburgh's island.
- Hildeburgh is said to have lived on Hilbre Island in the 7th century as an anchorite



Monastic Foundations

- Hilbre Island may already have been a hermitage before the Norman invasion or at least a place of pilgrimage based around the lore of St Hildeburgh.
- The area was part of the lands of the Norman lord Robert of Rhuddlan.
- He gave the islands to the abbey at Saint-Evroul-sur-Ouche in Normandy, who in turn passed responsibility to the Abbey of St. Werburgh in Chester.



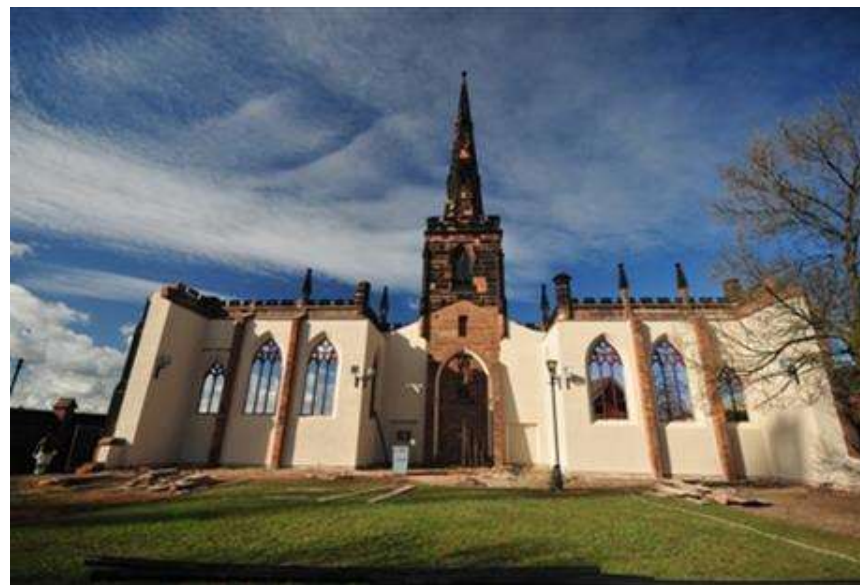
Monastic Foundations

- The island became a common place for pilgrimage in the 13th and 14th centuries.
- It was probably more of a hermitage although records do speak of a prior.
- Hilbre was dissolved in 1539.
- Two monks were allowed to remain on the island, as they maintained a beacon for shipping in the river mouth.
- The last monk left the island in about 1550.



Monastic Foundations

- The priory of St. James the Great at Birkenhead stood on a wooded headland on the north-eastern shore of the Wirral peninsula near a river ferry across the Mersey to Liverpool
- The existence of a ferry may have been the reason for the foundation of a monastery on such an isolated site and for its dedication.
- St James is the patron saint of travelers and pilgrims.



Monastic Foundations

- According to John Leland the priory was founded for sixteen monks and was a cell of Chester abbey.
- Although it is possible that the original monks were supplied by St. Werburgh's, there is no further evidence of dependency.



Monastic Foundations

- The date of foundation and the identity of the founder are as obscure as most other aspects of the history of the priory.
- The traditional date is 1150 but there is no documentary evidence that the priory existed before the second half of the reign of Henry II (1133-1189).



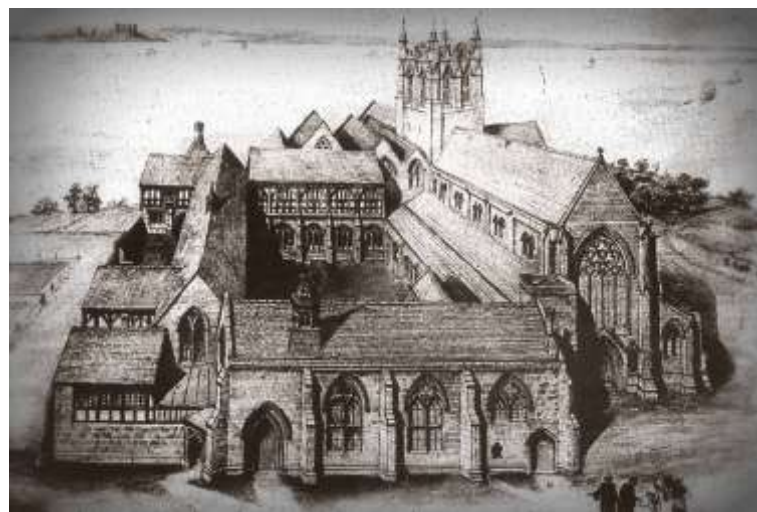
Monastic Foundations

- The nature of the priory's endowment suggests that a member of the Massey family of Dunham founded it, probably the second Hamon de Massey who died in 1185.
- Most of the lands and churches held by the priory at its dissolution had been part of the Massey fee in the 11th century and probably formed the original 12th century endowment.



Monastic Foundations

- Apart from the Birkenhead site the house held lands in the neighbouring manors of Claughton, Moreton, Tranmere, Higher Bebington, and Saughall.
- The churches of Bidston and Backford were probably also gifts from the founder.
- Before 1212 Henry de Walton gave the priory holdings at Newsham in Walton.
- The priory also held land in Melling.
- Apart from the initial endowment by the Massey family, all the benefactions and privileges for which evidence survives were insubstantial and the house was to remain small and poor throughout its existence.



Monastic Foundations

- The priory suffered a series of financial crises.
- One of the reasons was the ferry to Liverpool.
- There was no inn nearer than Chester so the monks had to put up travelers using the ferry.



Monastic Foundations

- In 1310 the prior and convent complained to the royal council that there were no inns nearer than Chester for travellers using the ferry and neither the revenues of the house, barely 200 marks a year, nor its buildings sufficed for the burdens of hospitality.
- They asked permission to build lodgings at the ferry and sell food to the passengers.
- In 1317 the Crown licensed them to build lodgings to house travellers delayed by the weather and in the following year those in charge of the lodgings were allowed to buy and sell food.



Monastic Foundations

- The fees charged by the Liverpool ferrymen elicited complaints from the inhabitants of Wirral.
- In 1330 Edward III, as a mark of favour to the monks and to travellers, granted the priory the right to ferry men, horses, and goods across the Mersey and to charge reasonable tolls.
- The grant may simply have licensed charges for a service which the monks had previously operated free as a work of charity.



Monastic Foundations

- In 1357 the prior had to uphold the right to the ferry when it was alleged in the forest court that the building of lodgings damaged the game in the forest and that the ferry tolls were excessive.
- The income from tolls and the provision of lodgings, which in 1536 was valued at £4 6s. 8d. a year, must have helped to alleviate the financial problems of the priory.



Monastic Foundations

- The priory itself used the ferry to sell produce at Liverpool market.
- From the early 14th century it held land and a granary in Liverpool.
- In 1350 the prior and a fellow monk were accused of assault and theft during the market.



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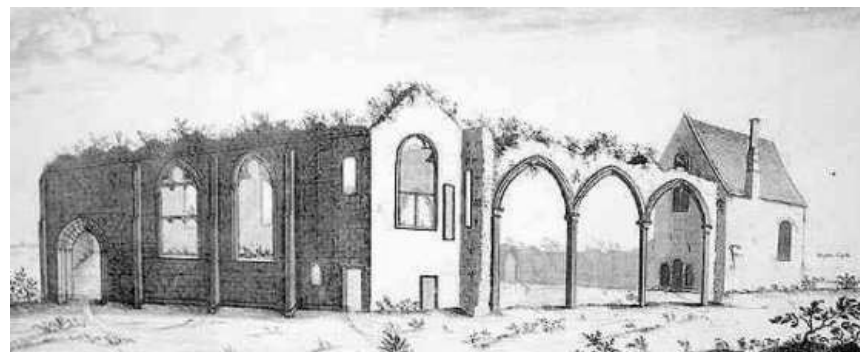
Monastic Foundations

- Little is known of the size or state of the house until the late 15th century.
- The monks or their tenants were sometimes involved in lawsuits but there is no evidence of serious disorder.
- In 1436, however, the priory was the scene of a notorious crime.



Monastic Foundations

- Isabel, the widow of Sir John Butler of Bewsey (Lancs.), was abducted by William Poole, a member of the Wirral family which supplied stewards for the priory in the 15th and 16th centuries.
- She was forcibly married to him in Bidston church, and imprisoned at Birkenhead where she was discovered by Sir Thomas Stanley.



Monastic Foundations

- Some fragmentary personal details of the lives of the monks have also survived.
- Two priors were bastards, and one had been a murderer and had undertaken a penitential pilgrimage to Rome before being professed as a monk at Birkenhead.
- In 1423 the prior, John Wood, failed to attend the meeting of the General Chapter allegedly because of madness.



Monastic Foundations

- At the dissolution the priory was included in the list of monasteries worth less than £200 a year and was liable for dissolution under the terms of the Act of 1536.
- It was probably dissolved in May or June 1536 as the prior was awarded an annual pension of £12 at the beginning of July.
- In the following year the former prior and four monks were dispensed to hold benefices with a complete change of habit.



Monastic Foundations

- The site of the priory was leased immediately to Ralph Worsley, a member of the royal household.
- In 1545 Worsley purchased the site and most of the priory's lands in Cheshire for £568 11s. 6d.
- The site included the buildings within the precincts, a mill, a flax field, fishyards and the ferry, ferryhouse and boat.



Monastic Foundations

- The priory buildings were allowed to fall into ruin after the dissolution, apart from the chapter house which was retained in use, first as a domestic chapel and later as a chapel for the district of Birkenhead until the new church of St. Mary was built on the site of the priory graveyard after 1819.
- The ruins were purchased by public appeal in 1896 and their care entrusted to the corporation of Birkenhead.
- In 1913 a faculty was obtained to renovate the chapter house and it was dedicated for use as a chapel in 1919





Reformation in Liverpool

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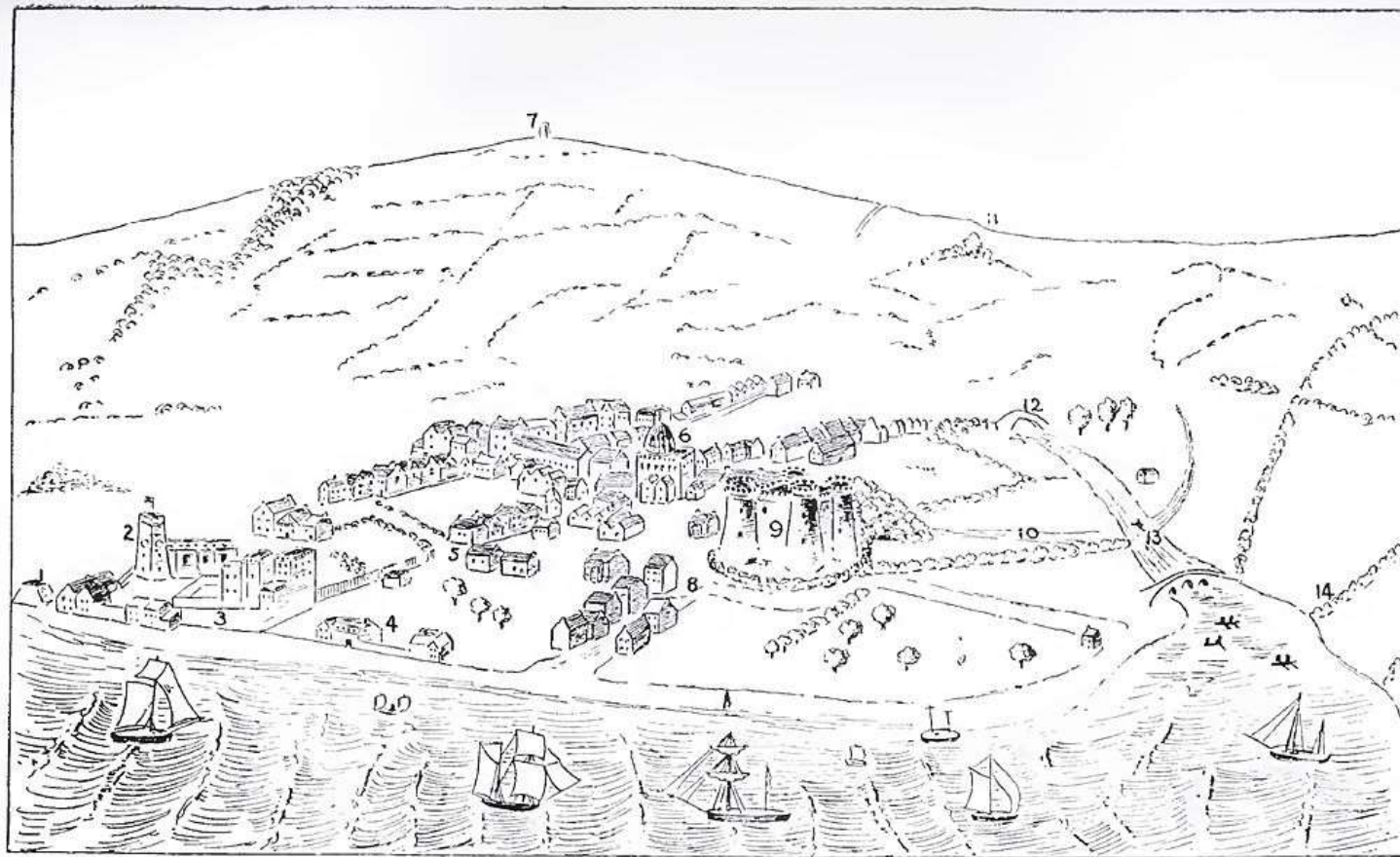


Fig. 27—Liverpool from the River in 1650.

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|---------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1—THE BATTERY | 4—CUSTOM HOUSE | 7—EVERTON BEACON | 10—POOL LANE | 13—THE POOL |
| 2—OLD CHURCH | 5—WATER STREET | 8—JAMES STREET | 11—LOW HILL | 14—ROAD TO PARK |
| 3—THE TOWER | 6—TOWN HALL | 9—OLD CASTLE | 12—TOWSEND BRIDGE | |