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THE HERMITAGE OR CHAPEL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

The Hermitage (as it is known today) is situated in a peaceful place, overshadowed by trees on the left bank of the River Coquet, coming down stream towards the castle at Warkworth. It is in the part of the Manor of Warkworth once called Sunderland Park, and was built as a chantry chapel in the period 1332/49, by Henry Percy 11, son of the first Percy, Lord of Alnwick; although some of it was built at a later date.

Having walked the path from the castle, reaching the landing stage, hailing the ferry, you have now entered a world of romance and intrigue; guidebooks cannot convey the sense of romance being here brings the peace and serenity. Now walk slowly up the path through the trees, past the ancient spring on your right, to enter under the yew tree into the twilight world of The Hermitage.

The origins of the chapel are not precise, facts put it as 14th century, established as a chantry by a Percy lord: however romance has it being created by one Bertram of Bothal as a penance for having accidentally killed his beloved Isobella of Widdrington, and his brother in a rescue against Scottish kidnappers; this tale was edited and published in the 18th century by bishop Percy: the story is excellent but very little true facts, other than that the bishop wished to prove himself as one of the noble family; unfortunately he could not to their satisfaction, as he was born of trades folk from Bridgenorth in Worcester. It is also said that Harry Hotspur's son, landless and living in Scotland after his father's abortive attempt to overthrow Henry IV, secretly married Eleanor daughter of the powerful Nevilles, in the chapel. In fact the two did marry after he regained his rightful place, as to a secret wedding some time prior to the official one it is not for me to say, I leave that to the individual and the mood suited to the spot.

The first record of anyone living here was in 1471, when the chantry living was given to Thomas Barker, in order that he might say prayers for the Percy family; in 1506, John Green took over the post, then followed Edward Slegg in 1515, the last incumbent was George Lancaster in 1531. George also became the agent for the park as at this time life was not so certain for the Percy's and in 1536, the chapel and living were abandoned, as the catholic religion was not popular, particularly as the Percy family were involved in The Pilgrimage of Grace against Henry VIII. It was during the 15th century that the Hermitage was extended, adding the living accommodation on the lower level to the original hewn out chapel and it was, I believe, during Edward Slegg's time it became known as the Hermitage, as in the parish records he is listed as "The hermit in residence at the Chapel of the Holy Trinity in the parks at Warkworth".

A TOUR OF "THE HERMITAGE"

First constructed in the early fourteenth century, the Hermitage consisted of three chambers hewn out of the rock; later in that period rooms were added to the face of the cliff; these were altered about a hundred years later. The ground floor, partly set in under the overhang has a central doorway with a small internal lobby. To the left was the hall 4.6m by 5.5m, with a fireplace, a large window facing the river, a small window commanding the entrance, a cupboard and a door at the northeast end opening from a two storied annex which appears to have been a later addition. The jambs of the lobby doors are scarred where tools or weapons were sharpened there in the past. To the right of the lobby is a doorway now blocked by more modern stonework steps to the chapel; at the base of the steps is the remains of the kitchen about 4.6m square, with a bread oven, the base of which remains. Some kind of passage crossed over the kitchen from the earlier steps, hewn out of the cliff, to the door of the chapel, and perhaps to the door of the solar on the

floor above, the stairs to this floor at this point have disappeared.

The solar, on the first floor, had a window facing the river, a garderobe (latrine) in the northwest corner, and a fireplace in the south wall. It's plan is now very irregular as it's back consists of part of the much smaller rock-hewn chamber which preceded it, the west end was either removed when the house was built or had fallen away prior to construction.

Chapel and sacristy: climb the steps to this area, both are set parallel with the river at an angle of 45 degrees to the house; they lie southeast-northwest, but for convenience of description they are considered as lying east-west.

A miniature porch with a seat on either side leads into the inner door of the chapel above which is carved the figures of Christ on the cross with Mary and John on either side; on the inside of this doorway there is said to have been a shield an object resembling a gauntlet, however there are no traces of it now so it may have been a painted emblem rather than carved; under the shield may have been painted the words FUERUNT MIHI LACRYMAE PANES DIE AC NOCTE. (My tears have been my meat day and night; Psalm xlii: 3).

The inner chapel measures 2.3m by 6.2m and is covered by three groined bays imitating vaulting supported by semi-octagonal shafts with moulded caps and bases, all cut from solid rock. The two shafts at the northwest end are unfinished possibly due to Scottish raids in 1341, when Warkworth was sacked, an opportunity to hire fresh workers did not arise before the plague of 1349; work was finally abandoned in 1352, on the death of Henry Percy the patron of the work.

At the east end is an altar with a small cusped recess above it, no doubt for relics; one of the consecration crosses still remains; the altar at present is covered in graffiti some dating to the turn of the 20th century.

On your left when facing the altar, is a four-light barred but unglazed window with flowing tracery, which admits borrowed light to the sacristy. To the right of the altar is an arched recess with two single-light windows: in this recess is a curious piece of sculpture representing a reclining woman; her head supported on a pillow and her feet resting against a piscine. In the recess at her feet is the figure of a man in rough garb; in the window nearest him is the head of a bull, and next to that the possible representation of an angel, at her breast is what is believed to be an infant; the whole may be a Nativity, however due to its poor state this is just conjecture as other theories have been put forward; from it been Isobella to Hotspurs mother, and as there are no records from the period in question it is a case of making ones own mind up.

In the centre bay on the south side is a quatrefoil opening with a bowl cut into the inner sill; on the north side are three narrow trefoil headed slits forming the front of a squint which allows the chapel altar to be seen from the west end of the sacristy.

The west bay of the chapel has a doorway to the sacristy, opposite the entrance; above it is a shield bearing the Instruments of the Passion, with the text once visible, (Dederunt in escam meam fel; et in siti mea potaverunt me aceto) They gave me gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink; Psalm lxxix: 22.

The sacristy measures 1.6m by 8.5m, which includes a lobby once screened off at the west end, in its walls are two recesses the smaller one a cupboard, the larger one may be a bed recess from the original chantry; there is another altar at the far end of the sacristy with part of the wall cut away, it is possible that during the Reformation when places like this were banned, officials came here to take away any valuables and finding none rapped on this wall, getting a hollow echo, believing there to be a room beyond they cut the wall away. The sacristy ceiling is

plain, rib less, barrel vaulted, the whole interior was decorated in white and other colours, traces of paint were still to be found in the nineteenth century. The now open end was once enclosed and there are traces of steps and a doorway; we will never know what the Hermitage looked like in it's heyday but by using our minds-eye we can see more than is visible.