

Warkworth Hermitage

The Hermitage is located along the bank of the River Coquet about half a mile upstream from Warkworth Castle and it can only be accessed by boat. It is a two storey building carved out of a natural sandstone cave and comprises a small chapel with an altar and two other small rooms thought to be the hermit's living quarters.

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The origins of the Hermitage are unclear although the legend tells of Sir Bertram of Bothal one of the Earl Percy's knights who was betrothed to the Lady Isabel, the daughter of Lord Widdrington. He was badly wounded in battle and he sent a message to Isabel begging her to come to his side. However, he waited in vain for her to arrive and as soon as he was able to ride, he set out

with his brother to Isabel's home. There he learned that she had left immediately she received the message, and must have been kidnapped by the Scots. Sir Bertram and his brother set off in different directions to find her.

Wandering through the countryside in disguise, Sir Bertram eventually heard about a princess held captive in the tower of a remote castle. Arriving at the castle he was unable to get in and kept watch in a nearby cave. He eventually saw Isabel framed in the window of the tower. Exhausted he then fell into a deep sleep. Awoken by noises, he saw Isabel being helped down a rope ladder, by a figure in Highland costume. Brandishing his sword, Sir Bertram ran to the attack and dealt his opponent a fatal blow. Isabel, recognising Sir Bertram's voice, rushed between the two men and shouted that it was his own brother. However it was too late and the next huge blow from Bertram's sword killed them both.

Returning to Warkworth, Bertram gave all his lands and wealth away to the poor, and built the tiny Hermitage, where he lived in solitude for the rest of his life. In the chapel he built an altar-tomb with the effigy of a beautiful lady, her hands raised in prayer. At her feet kneels the figure of a hermit, his left hand pressed to his heart, as if in sorrow. Over the doorway he carved an inscription, which translated reads: "My tears have been my meat night and day". Successive hermits were patronised by the Earls of Northumberland until the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

Their role was to say prayers for a number of nobles listed by the Earl in return for pasture for 12 cows, a garden, 20 loads of firewood, fish every Sunday and £20 a year. It was also a popular place of pilgrimage.

Today the Hermitage is owned and operated by English Heritage and is open on Sundays, Wednesdays and Bank Holidays during the summer to visitors.

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