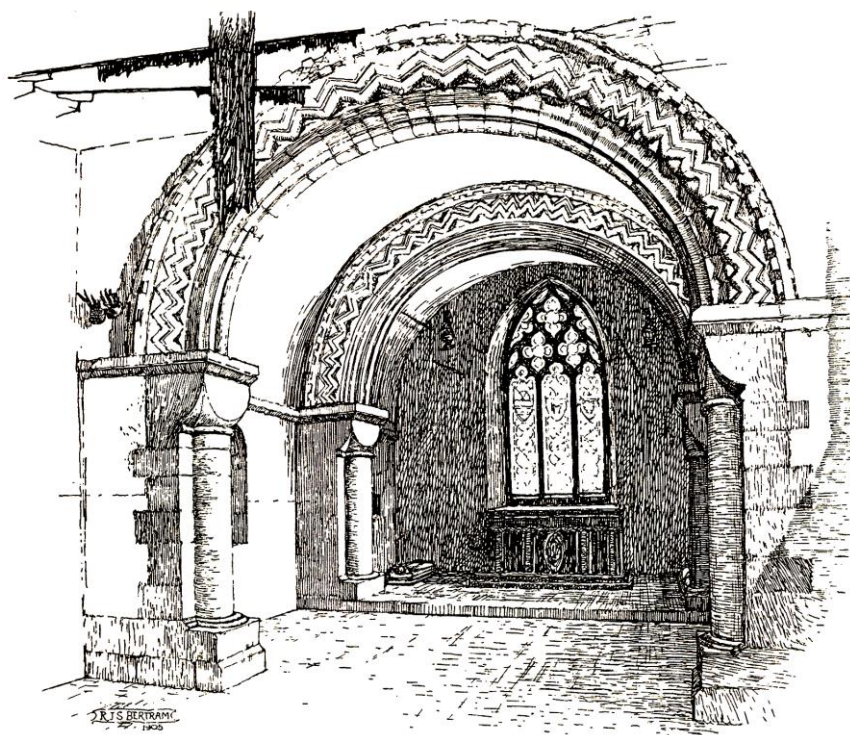


# The Church of Our Lady, Seaton Delaval

## Archaeological Assessment April 2006



SEATON DELAVAL CHAPEL, INTERIOR.

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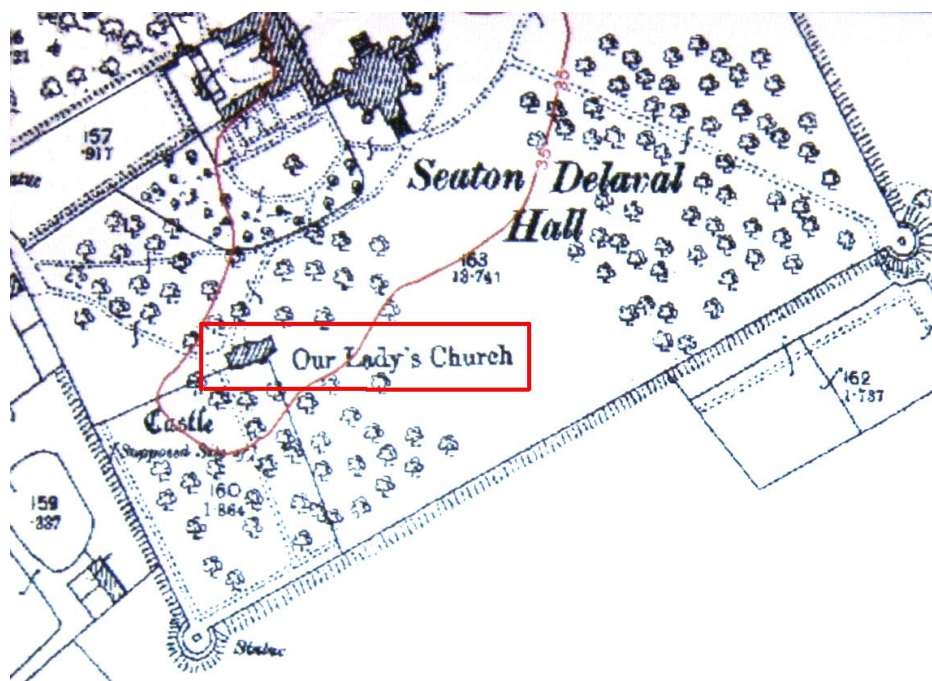
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## The Church of Our Lady, Seaton Delaval

The parish church of Our Lady (NZ 322 764) stands c 120 m to the south of Seaton Delaval Hall, and within the ha-ha wall that encloses the great early-18th century mansion. The prime function of the building was long as a private chapel of the Delavals (being attached to the medieval manor that preceded the present house) but it was made a parish church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although funerary monuments associated with the Delaval family, a pair of medieval effigies and a series of later hatchments, are of importance, the building itself is an unusual one and of considerable interest.



The church and its Environs from the Ordnance Survey 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 25":1 mile map (c1890)

The church is aligned somewhat north of east, an orientation shared with the present house and grounds, and also, one presumes, with the lost medieval manorial buildings. It consists of an aisleless nave 9.4 by 7.6 m externally and an eastern arm 8.7 by 6.5 m, with no external evidence of its internal division into chancel and sanctuary, of equal length. There is also a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century western porch.

### Historical Notes

It is claimed that the chapel was built by Hubert de Laval, nephew of William the Conqueror, and consecrated by Bishop Flambard of Durham in 1102<sup>1</sup>; it formed a chapel within the parish of Tynemouth, and although usually styled a chantry, was something more than a private chapel attached to the manor of the Delavals in that it had rights of baptism and its own burial ground. After the Reformation its use seems to have been intermittent; Archdeacon Sharpe in 1723 could not find 'that the sacraments had been administered in it in the memory of man'. In 1891 Lord Hastings presented the chapel to the Church of England, as the parish church of the new parish of Delaval.

<sup>1</sup>Jackson (1900), 3: the Northumberland County History (1909, 186) sees the earliest mention of the chapel as being in an 1174 charter.

## Description

The **Nave** is short and lofty, ‘of almost Anglo-Saxon proportions’ (Pevsner), and although simple architecturally contains a variety of fabric types. The lower parts of both side walls are of coursed quite small rubble, extending up to about mid-height. On the north the upper part of the wall is of better-quality squared stone similar to that in the eastern arm, but on the south, where there seems to have been more patching and rebuilding, most of the upper wall is of less regularly-coursed stone, much of it bearing a rough diagonal tooling. The angle quoins, laid in rough alternate manner, are of no great size, and more or less the same for the full height of each corner. A ragged break at the west end of the north wall suggests that the north-west angle may have been rebuilt. The west wall, the lower part of which is largely covered by the porch, is of roughly-squared stone quite similar to that on the south; the east wall, above the chancel roof, is of roughly-coursed large rubble.

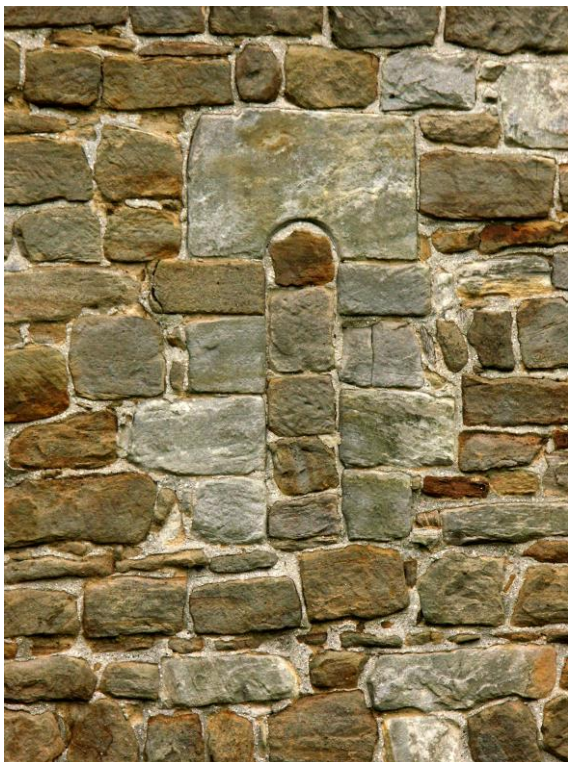


In the centre of the west wall, inside the porch, the west door is a very plain square-headed opening with a semicircular sunk tympanum bordered by a single line of indented zigzag ornament; all that remains visible of the design carved upon the tympanum is what seems to be a head at the top centre, inclining slightly to the r. The door-head has a simple hoodmould chamfered above and below; directly above are a series of three heraldic panels set in ogee cusped frames, re-set remnants (along with five more on the

internal face of the wall) of a late 14<sup>th</sup> century tomb<sup>2</sup>, and above these is a very plain square-headed window of uncertain date, with a rough relieving arch a course above its monolithic lintel. Higher up, above the porch roof, is an opening into the roof-space which has a crude two-centred arch, apparently cut through rough walling stones. The gable has a coping chamfered on its underside, and a 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> century cross finial; the northern slope shows a clear structural break between the walling below and the later coping.

The south wall of the nave (above) has two tall lancet windows with chamfered surrounds, their dressings of tooled-and-margined fawn ashlar; most of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century windows in the church have alternating block surrounds of this type, are continued around their two-centred heads, with the apex of the arch cut into a single lozenge-shaped block. Between them is what looks like a patch of secondary masonry that extends almost down to ground level, and to the east of this, in the lower wall, a row of stones that look like re-used architectural fragments - a section of a column, and stones with chamfered edges - as well as a rectangular block with a square cut-out, perhaps for a drain, 1.3 m from the east end of the wall.

<sup>2</sup>The panels are described in the Northumberland County History IX, 185-6) ‘the panels contain shields, on four of which are the arms of Delaval (*ermine, two bars vert, differenced with a mullet on the upper bar*); two shields give the following arms: gules, a lion rampant ermine crowned or, charged with a molet; and on the two remaining shields is a ridged cross.



The north side of the nave now has no openings, although there is one blocked window, west-of-centre (left), set in the better-squared masonry of the upper section of wall; it is a simple Romanesque character, with its semicircular head cut into the soffit of a large rectangular block, and rough alternating jambs. Higher up, and slightly east-of-centre, is an odd feature what seems to be an infilled vertical slot cut in the top c2.5 m of the c 6 m high wall.

The east wall of the nave is capped by a bellcote, with two round-arched bell openings under a gable topped by a simple wheel cross; in its present form, it looks entirely of 19th-century date. The external face of the wall seems to show some sort of crude brick arch immediately above the ridge of the chancel roof.

The **West Porch** is built of squared stone with a distinctive pecked tooling, said to have been left over from the building of the Hall. The west doorway has a square head, then above that a pointed arch, with the usual alternating block frame, containing the re-set monolithic head of the 14th century east window, which was of three lights, with reticulated tracery. The gable above has a coping chamfered on its underside. On the south of the porch is a lancet window copying the form and proportions of those on the south of the chancel, and on the north a smaller round-arched window.

As already mentioned the **Eastern Arm** of the church is of coursed squared stone; both side walls show a single course of much thinner stones c 2 m above ground level. On the south there are two 19<sup>th</sup>-century lancets, shorter versions of those in the nave; the western cuts through the remains of an earlier doorway which has been a square-headed opening with a roll-moulded surround, perhaps of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; most of its west jamb, the western angle of the head and lower part of the east jamb survive, much eroded.

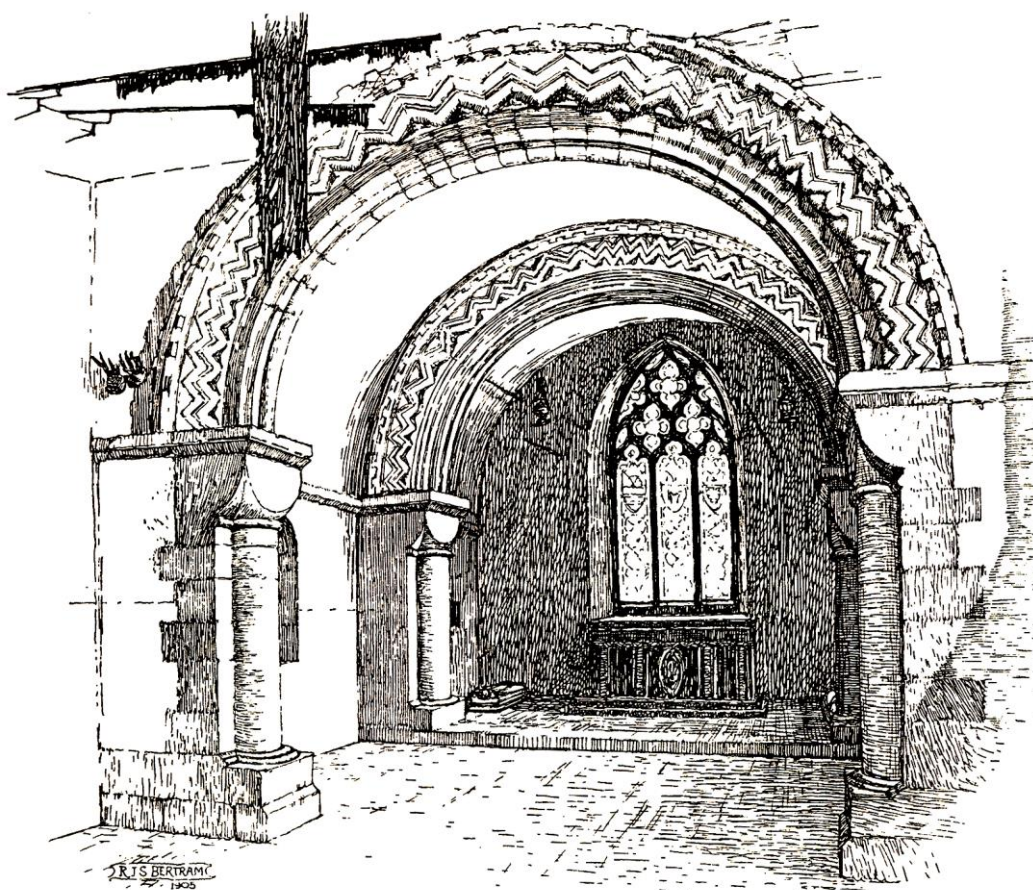
There has been another doorway in a corresponding position on the north, but only its lower jambs are visible, its upper part having been destroyed by a small 19<sup>th</sup>-century window with a round-arched head.

The quoins at the eastern angle of each side wall of the chancel are of similar sized stones to the general walling, but do not course in well with them; it rather looks as if the east end has been taken down and rebuilt, re-using much of the old material. The present east window is of three lights with reticulated tracery over, a mid-19th century copy of a 14<sup>th</sup>-century predecessor. The upper part of the gable end, from around the level of the springing of the window head, is of larger pecked stone, and apparently a post-medieval rebuild; above the east window is a slatted opening into the roof space, with a square head under a sunk panel with a two-centred arch. The gable has a slab coping, notched into the large shaped kneelers.

## The Interior

The interior of the church is plastered throughout, and dominated by the two splendid near-identical Romanesque arches between nave and chancel and chancel and sanctuary.

Inside the Nave, any rear arch to the west door is concealed by a timber architrave; above it are a series of five more shields in cusped panels re-used from the medieval tomb, and then the west window with its broad internal splay and its head truncated by a heavy 18<sup>th</sup>-century plaster cornice that runs all round the nave, below the coved plaster ceiling. The two windows on the south have heavy projecting internal sills, stepped and hollow-chamfered on their lower angles, and cut through the coving, which rises to a central panel bordered by a dentil cornice.



SEATON DELAVAL CHAPEL, INTERIOR.

(drawing from Northumberland County History 1909)

On the east is the arch into the **Chancel**. This rises from responds with attached half shafts, carrying heavy cushion capitals and an impost band, grooved and chamfered on its lower angle. The arch is semicircular and of two orders, the inner with a soffit-roll between two hollows, and the outer with bold chevron, under a billet-moulded hood with chip-carved patterns ('star ornament') on its face; the east face has a simpler hood. The impost bands of the two arches are continued along the side walls of the chancel and sanctuary, forming the springing of a simple barrel vault, interrupted only by the rear arches of the windows.

The arch into the **Sanctuary** is virtually identical to that between chancel and nave, except for some minor details of its hoodmould, which towards the west has incised chevrons rather than chip-carved geometrical patterns. Both arches are of identical width, but the sanctuary is 0.60 m narrower than the chancel, a reduction achieved by the internal thickening of the walls.

In the Sanctuary there is a 14<sup>th</sup>-century piscina at the east end of the south wall, with a shelf at mid-height, a trefoiled ogee arch, and a bowl of which the projecting front has been cut away. In the centre of the north wall are two small aumbries hidden behind later doors. The east window has a plain pointed rear arch; to the south of it is a projecting corbel or bracket, scalloped into a shell-like form on its lower surface, that looks a bit fresh to be a genuine medieval feature, unless heavily re-cut.

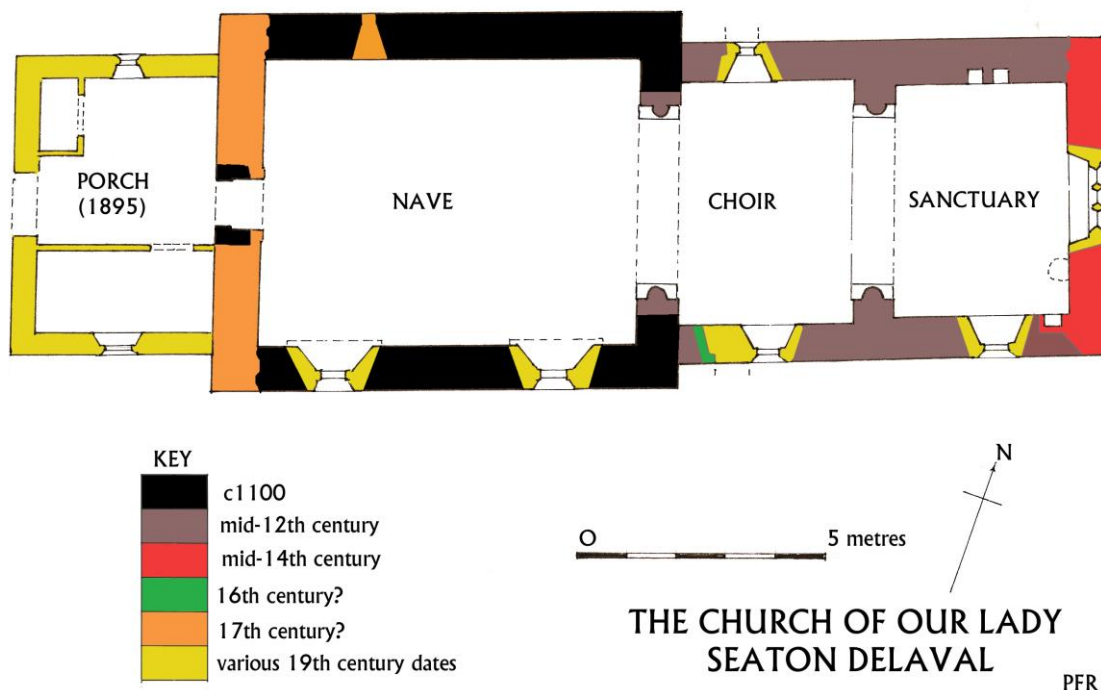
The only means of access to the roof structures of the church is by either the small opening high in the east gable, or, even more difficult of access, that in the west gable above the porch roof. The barrel vaults in the eastern arm and Georgian coved ceiling in the nave mean that there are considerable attics or roof spaces above, which have not been inspected.

### **Structural History**

There are clearly two early building phases in the church. The nave with its rubble masonry pre-dates the eastern arm with its more typically Romanesque squared stone. The tall and narrow proportions of the nave, and the blocked window on the north, have been seen as indicative of a Saxon origin, but there are no features of clear Pre-Conquest character. The character of both the angle quoins, and the wall thickness would both correlate with an early Norman rather than a Saxon date. The most obvious reading of the fabric would be of a nave, perhaps of c1100 (the very simple west door may well date to this phase) heightened in squared stone, with the eastern arm being added c 1150 in similar squared stone. The ‘early’ window on the north of the nave is in the heightened section of wall. The three-cell plan produced is unusual, although there are parallels- Bolam and Thockrington, and, the only one to preserve its original apsidal east end, Old Bewick. It is quite likely that Seaton Delaval originally had an apse; the additional thickness of the walls of the easternmost compartment may be linked to the structural considerations entailed in having a semicircular east end. The County History suggests that there might have been a low tower over what is now the chancel, but had this been the case one would have expected this section to have had the thickest walls.

The east end was rebuilt square in the mid-14th century, to judge from the east window, the original head of which is now re-set over the west door. This is a fine example of the local tradition of monolithic tracery, perhaps best exemplified in the even-more-elaborate head of the south aisle east window at Felton. The chancel piscina is probably contemporary with the window as well. The blocked priest’s door on the south of the chancel looks to be of 16<sup>th</sup>-century character, although it might perhaps be early Post-Reformation work.

The church has undergone considerable Post-Medieval repair and alteration. Thomas Delaval noted that his father, Sir Ralph Delaval (1622-1691) ‘repayred the chappell, built the new west end of it, slated it, put up the steeple new, glased it, plaistered it all over without and within, new hewed the pillars and arches and new stalled seated it all and hung up two bells in it’ (Green 2002, 2). This sounds like a fairly comprehensive ‘restoration’, and would



explain the difference in fabric between the west end and side walls of the nave; it is conceivable that the nave was shortened, the early west door being re-set<sup>3</sup>, possibly from a more conventional position in a side wall. The 'steeple' is presumably the bell-cote. Had there been an earlier bell-cote, or even a tower, in the more usual position at the west end?

Further works are recorded in 1737, when the present Georgian plaster ceiling was constructed; Jackson (1900, 5) states that this took place after the collapse of the 'original barrel ceiling' but this may be a surmise; the surviving Romanesque window in the north wall of the nave seems set rather high for a vault.

An examination of the fabric suggests that, in addition to the west end, much of the south wall of the nave, and the upper part of the east end of the chancel are of post-medieval date. Other changes took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The east window was renewed either in 1859 (Martin 2002, 3) or 1861 (Jackson 1900, 15); the present windows on the south of nave and chancel may be of this date as well, or a little earlier, possibly replacing older (but still post-medieval) windows of similar proportions. The bell-cote in its present form looks Victorian. Jackson (5) records further repairs in 1878, when the old three-decker pulpit was removed along with a stone screen between nave and chancel.

The west porch is of 1895, and re-used the head of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century east window which had been lying in the churchyard since 1859.

The churchwardens' records show that during roof repairs in 1959 the timbers over the chancel were renewed, and those over the nave treated..

<sup>3</sup>Of perhaps simply its head re-used.

## Archaeological Assessment

In any ancient church as this, both the archaeological deposits beneath the present floors and the above-ground fabric may still have the potential to yield much further information as regards the date and development of the building. Although Seaton Delaval church remains, at ground level at any rate, much in its 12<sup>th</sup>-century form, there is still a possibility of sub-floor structural remains, either of some undocumented earlier building, or of foundations beneath the present chancel of a possible predecessor that accompanied the c1100 nave. The possibility that the present nave has been shortened has already been mentioned, which could mean sub-surface remains outside the present west end, or beneath the west porch.

It is known that there is a Delaval family vault beneath the eastern arm of the church, last officially inspected (by Lord and Lady Delaval) in 1893<sup>4</sup>; this is probably of post-medieval date, and will have obviously disturbed earlier deposits and structural remains. The exact extent of the vault is not clear. It is highly likely that there are other burials beneath the floor of the remainder of the church. Any works entailing disturbance of floors, or of the ground adjacent to the external perimeter of the church, will require archaeological supervision.

The internal wall faces of the church are completely concealed by plaster. Any disturbance of this will also need careful monitoring; there is always the possibility that older plasters, perhaps with mural decoration, may be concealed by the present surface. The underlying wall fabric is also obviously of importance, and any temporarily-exposed sections will merit careful recording.

Due to the unusual nature of the church, this assessment could not include any inspection of the roof structures of the building. If access to these becomes available, they should be inspected and recorded by an archaeologist. Although documentary records suggest that the timber structure over the chancel has been renewed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there may be features of significance in the internal faces of the upper walls.

It should be borne in mind that the church formed part of an important medieval manorial site, about which little is known. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions of the Ordnance Survey 25":1 mile map show 'supposed site of castle' immediately to the south of the church, whilst the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> editions place the same label a little to the north, between the church and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century hall. Jackson (1900, 3) states that 'the old castle....stood at the south-west of the chapel'. The present hall (1718-1729) is said to have replaced a 'Tudor-Jacobean manor house'<sup>5</sup>. The present churchyard has only been in use since c1900.

*Peter F Ryder April 2006*

Green, Martin (2002) 'a Sacred Site for Many Centuries' in Church of Our Lady 900, anniversary publication by the Friends of the Church of Our Lady

Jackson, Rev G.W. (1900) The Lady Chapel (Delaval Parish Church) (republished 2006)

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<sup>4</sup>Six coffins, all of 18<sup>th</sup>-century date, were seen; a copy of a handwritten note describing them, and a rough sketch, is given by Jackson (1900, 14)

<sup>5</sup>A row of cottages west of the Orangery, north-east of the Hall, incorporates a very thick wall at its west end which is presumably part of some earlier structure.