

## IX.—ST. MARY'S CHAPEL, AND THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S WELL, JESMOND.

BY PARKER BREWIS, M.A., F.S.A., A VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE  
SOCIETY.

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The ruin of St. Mary's chapel, Jesmond, plates XXXIII to XXXIX, is the oldest existing ecclesiastical building in the city and county of Newcastle upon Tyne. The same claim has been made for St. Nicholas's, St. Andrew's and for St. John's churches. There is, however, no documentary evidence as to the exact date of the foundation of any of these buildings, each is left to reveal its own history. Judged solely by the remaining architecture, St. Mary's is the earliest. Its remains exhibit the work of several periods; the oldest portion, built in the first quarter of the twelfth century, is Norman. The responds of the chancel arch are of this period. They are semi-cylindrical, with moulded bases on square plinths; on the north side is a massive scalloped, or sub-divided cushion capital, with chamfered abacus, whilst on the south side is a rudely carved Corinthianesque capital with down turned volutes at the angles. (Plate XXXIV.) Although these two capitals are of such different design, yet they are of the same date—indeed the two most characteristic capitals of the Norman period in England are the Corinthianesque and the scalloped.<sup>1</sup>

These are among the few examples in the north of

<sup>1</sup> The Corinthianesque capital is of two periods, the first is characteristic of early Norman work in England and was generally superseded by the Anglo-Norman cushion capital. The bisection of the cushion, as at Jesmond, forms the first stage of scalloping. Towards the close of the twelfth century, largely through Cistercian influence, the Corinthianesque capital reappeared in a highly refined form.

England, for here most of the so-called Norman architecture is not truly Norman but transitional in style and was built in the late twelfth century under a Plantagenet king. For example the chapel in the keep at Newcastle upon Tyne is 1177 A.D.

It has generally been supposed that the fragments of the nave walls of St. Mary's chapel are of the same date as the responds they abut on, *i.e.* Norman.<sup>2</sup> The chamfered base course on the north side of the nave is also said to be of this date.<sup>3</sup> But the upper surface of the most westerly stone of this chamfered base is uncovered and proves it to be a late window jamb, with groove for glass and housings for iron bars, re-used in a horizontal position as a chamfered plinth. Therefore the north wall of the nave must have been down practically to the ground level and rebuilt with old material. The south wall of the nave is not only rebuilt, but is also in a different position from the original south wall of the nave, for the two walls do not agree in relative positions to the original axis. Presumably the chancel arch would originally be in the central axis of the nave and chancel, but there is now nearly twice as much space from the south respond to the south wall of nave as there is from the north respond to the north wall of nave. Moreover, the north wall is twenty-five per cent. thicker than the south wall. Above all, the position of the south wall was obviously fixed by the projection of a fourteenth century buttress, on which its east end abuts with a straight joint. It must be later than the buttress, but, being built partly of re-used stones, it deceives many as to its date.

There are some re-used pieces of Norman stone work in other parts of the chapel, *viz*: the chancel arch, a capital without its abacus in the north wall of the chancel,

<sup>2</sup> Boyle's *Vestiges of old Newcastle and Gateshead*, p. 293, and W. H. Knowles's plan in Dr. Dendy's *Account of Jesmond*, *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd series, Vol. I, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Knowles, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

and a portion of a window jamb and sill,<sup>4</sup> high up in the south wall of chancel.

In the fourteenth or early fifteenth century the chancel was twice enlarged and almost entirely rebuilt, longer and higher than the original chancel, and at the same time the chancel arch was also stilted in proportion, that is to say the Norman arch was taken down, four courses of rough unmoulded masonry inserted over each capital, and then the Norman arch rebuilt, thus making the chancel arch some three and a half feet higher than it was originally.

The early piscina (plate XXXV) near the middle of the south side of the chancel wall indicates the position of the altar after the chancel was first rebuilt. When the chancel was again extended eastward, the projecting portion of the basin of this piscina was cut off and a new piscina (plate XXXVI) built at the east end of the south wall of the chancel to serve the altar in its new position under the present east window.

The two windows on the south side of the chancel have, on the inside, straight joints from their sills downwards in a line with their jambs, showing that they have been built up; possibly each in turn may have been the position of the sedilia. At the east end of the chancel are the remains of two broken brackets for images, one on either side of the altar. The corbel high up in the centre of the south wall of chancel was for the roof truss.

The next alteration was the extension on the north side of the chancel. The masonry of the extension does not course with that of the chancel, and the chancel has an external chamfered base course, which is not carried round the extension. The extension seems to have been built in the fifteenth century. There have been various explanations as to the use of this chamber. It has been described as a chapel or as a sacristy; its size would seem to indicate

<sup>4</sup> Norman window-sills are frequently high, but this one is above the impost of the chancel arch, therefore, if it had been in its original position, the Norman chancel would have been unusually high for its width.

that it was not a mere sacristy. It was a chantry chapel, but may also have served as a sacristy and be on the site of an earlier one.

It has two external doorways, one on the north and one on the west, also an opening (with a re-used Norman cap at the springing of the arch) for direct access to the chancel. Moreover from this chamber a view of the altar in the chancel was obtained through a square-headed opening that had late moulded jambs, head and sill towards the chancel and on the north side was rebated for a shutter; this squint is a late insertion.

It has been suggested that the lords of Jesmond brought relics from the Holy Land to Jesmond<sup>5</sup> which caused the chapel to become the object of pilgrimages; another suggestion is that some reputed miraculous healing by the waters of the well caused the pilgrims to congregate here. Certainly St. Mary's chapel and well were the resort of pilgrims,<sup>6</sup> and Gray, the earliest historian of Newcastle, in his *Chorographia*, 1649, p. 19, states that the Pilgrim Inn in Pilgrim Street was so named because the pilgrims lodged there on their visits to St. Mary's at Jesmond.

It became necessary to regulate the movements of the pilgrims who flocked to these shrines. In so small a chapel as this, it was especially desirable to arrange the ingoing and outgoing streams of traffic so that they did not meet and cause congestion. This northern chantry chapel seems designed for that purpose. It is suggested that the pilgrims entered by the west door of the chantry chapel (plate XXXVII), and proceeded direct to the altar, kissed the reliquary and then went out *via* the doorway in the north wall.

The advowson was an appurtenance of the manor. In 1333 the manor was divided between three sisters, and trouble arose as to regulating the turns of presentation to the living. Because there are now three piscinas—two in the chancel and one in the northern chapel—it has been

<sup>5</sup> Dendy, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix, p. III, and Boyle, p. 295.

assumed that at one time there were three altars<sup>7</sup> and that these were the altars of the thirds of the manor, or that the owners of each third of the manor maintained a chantry in this chapel. But there is no such thing as a manorial altar and no evidence that there were three altars at any one time. The two piscinas in the south wall of the chancel indicate the position of the altar after the first and second extension of the chancel. It would probably be the same altar moved a little farther east. The piscina in the northern chapel implies that there was an altar under its east window which supplemented that in the chancel.

In 1422, Christiana Middleton, owner of one third of the manor, maintained a chantry of St. Mary in the chapel of Jesmond.<sup>8</sup> To which of the saints the other altar was dedicated is unknown. It is unlikely that both altars were dedicated to St. Mary. In England, in late medieval times, the dedications to St. Mary exceed those to any other saint, yet such dedications were uncommon so early as the first quarter of the twelfth century.

In the sixteenth century, the chapel was disendowed, dismantled and put to secular use, finally becoming a barn and stable. (Plate XXXVIII.)<sup>9</sup>

In 1549, Edward VI granted the chapel to the mayor and burgesses of Newcastle, from whom it soon passed into private hands. In 1883, sir William Armstrong (afterwards first lord Armstrong), gave back to Newcastle the plot of land on which the chapel stands.

Although the writer's study of the existing remains has led him to conclusions other than those arrived at by the late J. R. Boyle, F.S.A., in his *Vestiges of old Newcastle and Gateshead*, 1890, pp. 292, 295, and by Mr. W. H.

<sup>7</sup> Boyle, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>8</sup> *Inq. p.m.* 9 Henry V, No. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Plate XXXIX is from an unpublished copperplate in the possession of the Society. This view shows St. Mary's chapel from the south-west after the farm buildings, shown in plate XXXVIII, had been cleared away by James Losh the owner c. 1823.

Knowles, F.S.A., in Dr. Dendy's *Account of Jesmond*, 1904, *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd series, Vol. I, pp. 138-140, he wishes the present account to be regarded as a supplement to the works of these earlier investigators.

#### THE SITE OF ST. MARY'S WELL, JESMOND.

“The Holy well at Jesmond was anciently in high estimation, and hither, for the purpose of devotion, people came from all parts of the island.”<sup>10</sup>

Since the ceasing of the pilgrimages to the once famous St. Mary's chapel and holy well, the latter has been so neglected and forgotten that its actual site has been disputed. Claims have been made on behalf of several springs in the vicinity that each of these is the original St. Mary's well.

Nevertheless, the position of the well is correctly shown on the Ordnance Survey published in 1861 (County of Northumberland Sheet LXXXVIII, 16), plate XL, and is there marked as “St. Mary's Well.” It is again shown on the revised Ordnance Survey of Newcastle and Gateshead 1896, Sheet 6, and on the current edition 1919, XCIV, 8. The Director General of the Ordnance Survey states that it was so marked “on the authority of William Armstrong, Esq. (afterwards the first Lord Armstrong), and others.”

The well is situated on the south bank of the little dene running down between Jesmond Grove and Jesmond Manor House, and is in a direct line between these two houses. The well itself is now underground, but the north end of the stone head is still visible. It is said that on this head was inscribed the text *Ave Maria gratia plena* (Hail Mary full of grace), but many years ago some puritan erased most of this inscription, leaving legible only the word *gratia*.

<sup>10</sup> Sykes' *Local Records*, 1866, Vol. I, p. 49.

A picture of St. Mary's well (plate XLI), painted about the year 1870, and now in the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, shows the word *gratia* and also two iron crooks for the hinges of a wooden shutter. One of these crooks is still visible on the north end of the stone head that remains above ground. *Murray's Handbook, Durham and Northumberland*, 1873, states: "In a wooded hollow, and under a moss-grown arch with word *gratia* inscribed upon it, is St. Mary's well."

The late Richard Welford in an unpublished lecture entitled *1856-1906, Newcastle Fifty Years Ago*,<sup>11</sup> made the following statement regarding this well: "The Holy Well at Jesmond, much frequented in ancient times by pilgrims who came to worship at the adjoining shrine of St. Mary. The steps leading to it, it was said, were of the same number as the articles of the creed. I can never make the articles exceed eight, but here are ten steps. The upper ones look suspiciously modern, as though someone had tried to change the enumeration to that of the commandments." His lantern slide, No. 42,<sup>12</sup> illustrating this part of his lecture is now in the possession of this Society and shows this well as it was towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Messrs. Mann, Longden & Mann, solicitors to the owners of Jesmond Grove, have a photograph of the same well taken in 1903. Although this well is not situated on their property, they have a right of way thereto, and in the title deeds it is termed "St. Mary's Well."

From the above statements it is evident that the identification of the site of St. Mary's well is established. The corporation of the city propose to acquire it and have it excavated and restored.

The writer has been told by a Jesmond gentleman, that

<sup>11</sup> MS. in possession of Mr. John Oxberry, Hon. Sec., Soc. Antiq., Newcastle.

<sup>12</sup> This slide has been re-numbered 143 in the Society's collection. It is a similar view to that shown in plate XLI, and the word *gratia* is visible on the lintel.

his grandfather, one winter's day, took him to see this well because it was a warm spring and in cold weather a cloud of vapour issued from it. Doubtless this had much to do with its reputed medicinal qualities.

“ Those steps, once numbered with the creed, 'tis said,  
 Would like Bethesda's pool of old, be sought  
 By stricken ones, who to the spring were led  
 In hopes some miracle might here be wrought.

May kindly hands be raised to tend the weal  
 Of broken cistern and of crumbling shrine,  
 And by their care for sacred stones reveal  
 Their love and reverence for things divine.”<sup>13</sup>

Two other wells that have been claimed as the original St. Mary's well deserve mention. The first of these, well A, plate XL, is now covered over but is situated on the north side of this little dene and a little east of the remains of St. Mary's chapel. It deserved consideration because Dr. Dendy in his *Account of Jesmond*<sup>14</sup> states: “ There is a third spring (the basin of which is now walled up) on the north side of the dene, immediately below the walls of the chapel. This last was probably the original St. Mary's well.”

The Ordnance Survey of 1861 (plate XL) shows that old Jesmond Dene Road at that time ran close to the west front of what is there called the Appletree Inn, now the banqueting hall. It then turned, skirting the north side of the little dene, passed westward to near St. Mary's chapel, where, taking a dangerous curve, it crossed the dene and again turned sharply eastward to join the present Jesmond Dene Road. The curved portion was found to be so dangerous that, by the Newcastle upon Tyne improvement act of 1865, section XXXV, it was abolished and the road diverted to its present position, *i.e.* it now passes some distance west of the banqueting hall, leaving room there for

<sup>13</sup> *The Holy Well, Jesmond Grove*, by James Horsley, 1891.

<sup>14</sup> *Arch. Ael.*, 3rd series, Vol. I, p. 143.

carriages to turn and then runs southward in an almost direct line over the dene to join the old Jesmond Dene Road. In doing so, it passes over two subways. The northernmost of these was built to give visitors from Jesmond Dene access to St. Mary's chapel, and the second subway was to give the residents of Jesmond Dene Terrace access to well B, from which they then drew their water supply. After this new road was made, the old portion with the dangerous curve near the chapel was removed. About the year 1872 sir William Armstrong, afterwards first lord Armstrong, bought the little plot of land on which St. Mary's chapel stands. He had the north bank of the dene, where the old road had been, levelled up. When this was done, well A was covered up, though its stone trough was left in its old position, and a lead pipe from the trough was laid to well B. It has been said that the first lord Armstrong believed this well A to be the original St. Mary's well. But surely if he had thought so he would not have covered it up, and, above all, would not have given evidence to the Ordnance Survey that the well they have marked is the original St. Mary's well.

The well B (plate XL) deserves mention only because the corporation have affixed to the site a board with the following notice:

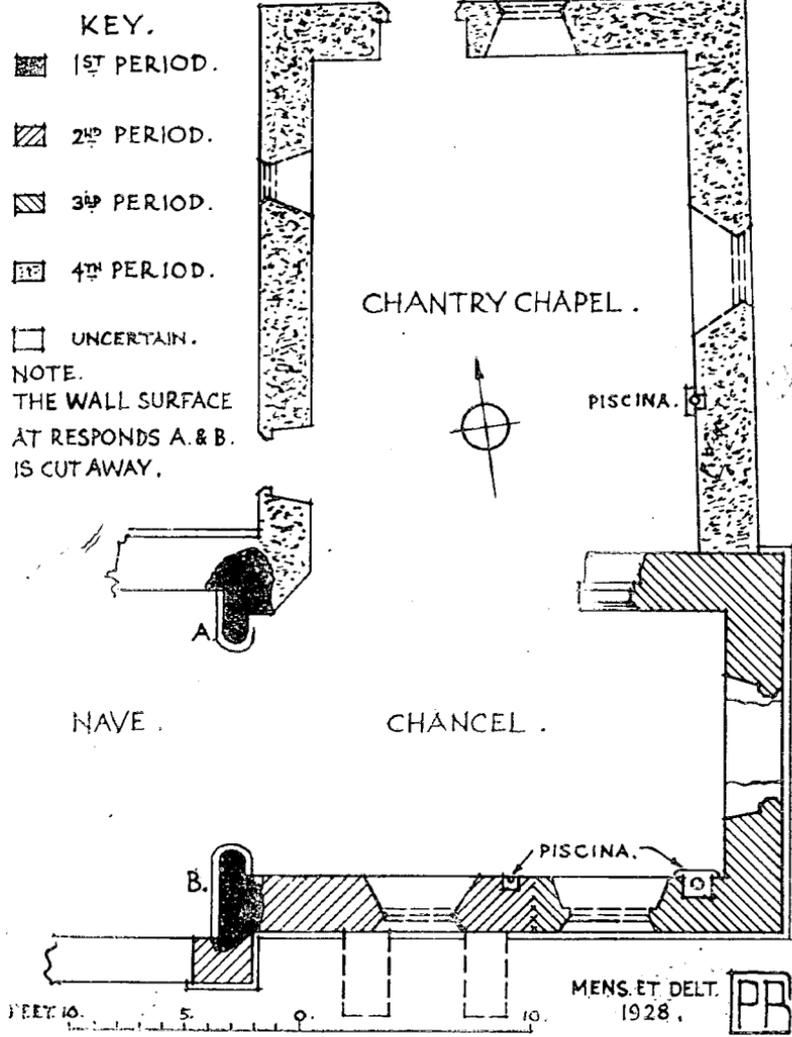
“ST. MARY'S.

*Permission to view the ruins  
of St. Mary's Well will be  
given on application to the  
Superintendent of Jesmond  
Dene Banqueting Hall.”*

Moreover, there has lately been some talk of the corporation placing steps down to this well, under the erroneous impression that it is the original St. Mary's well.

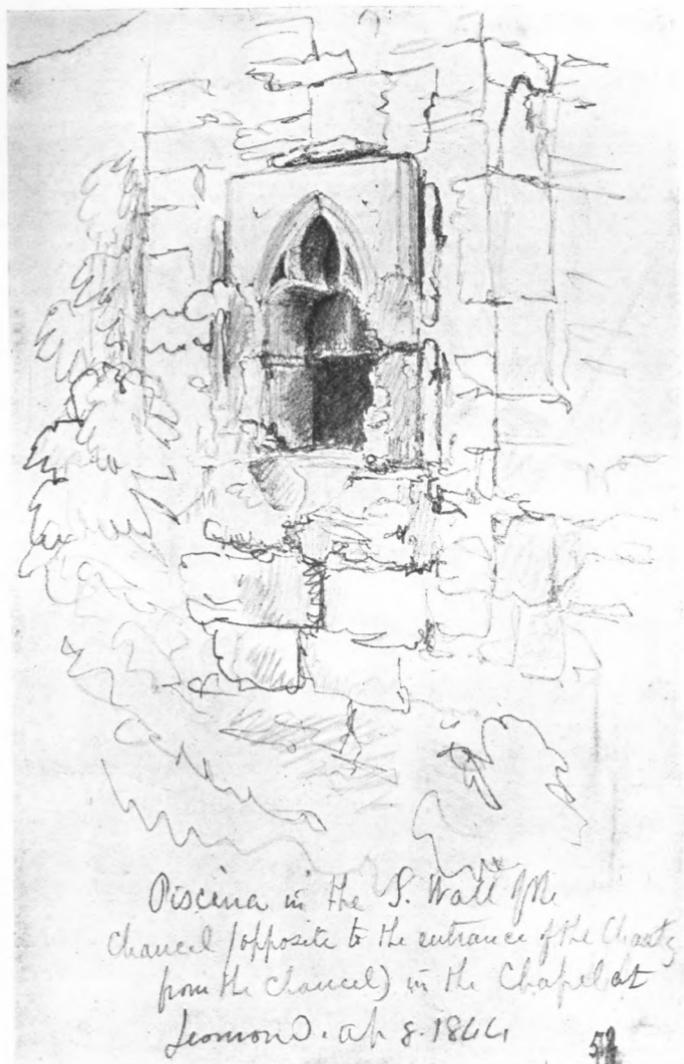
About eighty years ago Mr. Roger Pigg resided at Jesmond Dene Terrace. Before the town water supply

# S. MARY'S CHAPEL. JESMOND.





CAPITALS OF RESPONDS OF CHANCEL ARCH.



From a sketch by G. B. Richardson belonging to the Society.



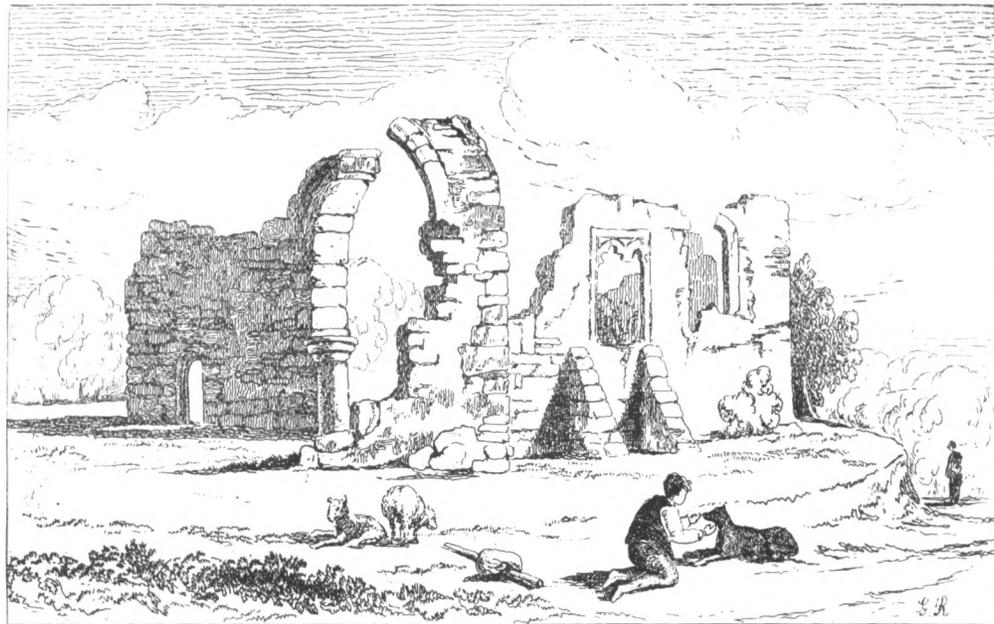
From a sketch by G. B. Richardson belonging to the Society.



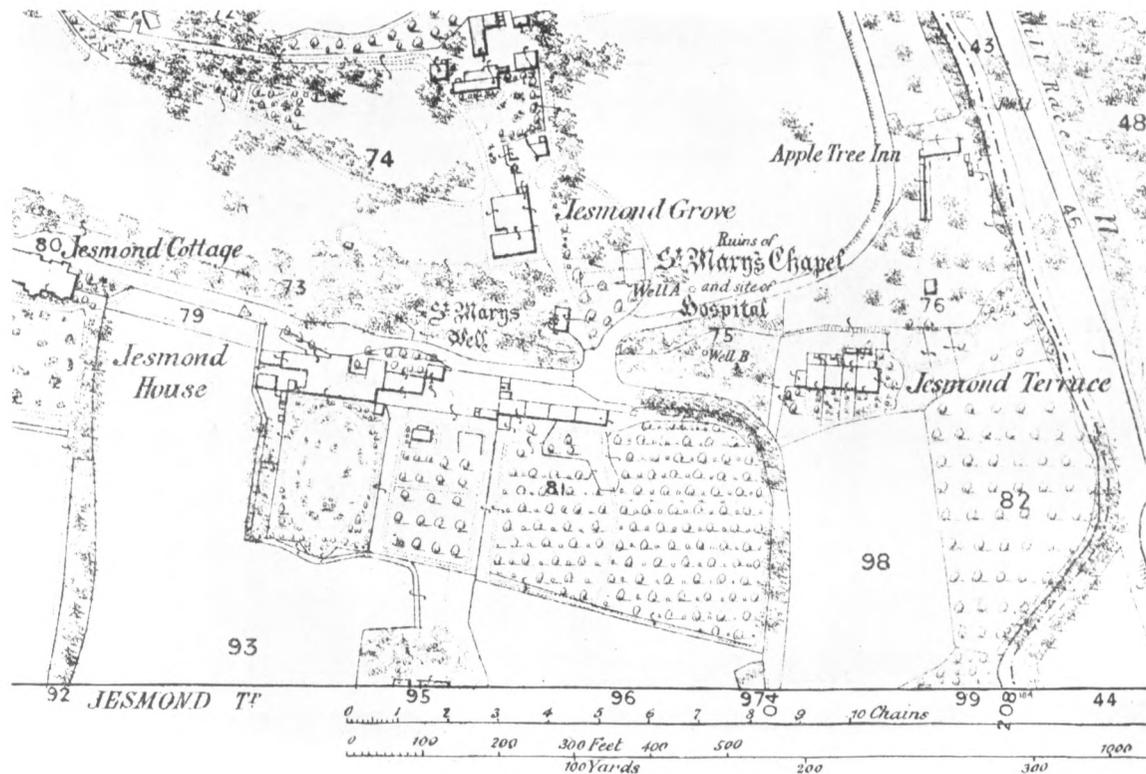
From a sketch by G. B. Richardson belonging to the Society.



From a sketch by G. B. Richardson belonging to the Society.



*St. Mary's Chapel, Jesmond.*





ST. MARY'S WELL, JESMOND. From a picture in the Laing Art Gallery painted about 1870.



was laid on there, he used to obtain water from well A, and had a plank across the dene for this purpose. The way from his house to well A passed a disused spring on the south bank of the dene which has now become well B, for Mr. Pigg applied to the landowner for permission to clean out this spring and to surround it with brickwork. This being granted, he subsequently drew water from well B, which was not only nearer his house than was his former supply, well A, but also did not necessitate crossing the plank. The cottagers living in the neighbourhood soon termed the new well, B, "Pigg's well," much to the annoyance of Mr. Pigg and his family. This well is still called Pigg's well, though it is also erroneously termed St. Mary's well.<sup>15</sup>

Note on plate XI. The building marked as the "Apple Tree Inn," where the banqueting hall now is, was the Burn Beer House. Plot No. 81, on this plate, was Apple Tree Gardens and the building shown on it was the Apple Tree Inn.

On this plate wells A and B have been added to the Ordnance Survey plan.

#### APPENDIX.

"1428. 5 Non. March. To all faithful. Relaxation, during ten years, of one year and forty days of enjoined penance, to penitents who, on the principal feast of the year and of the dedication of the below mentioned church, visit and give alms for the repair and conservation of the chapel of St. Mary, Jesmond, in the diocese of Durham, to which resort a multitude on account of divers miracles wrought therein through the merits of St. Mary, the Virgin, whose buildings are very ruinous." *Cal. Papal Registers, Papal Letters*, VIII, p. 22. Quoted from *Pro. Soc. Ant. N/c.*, 3rd Ser., Vol. IV, p. 46.

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<sup>15</sup> The writer is indebted for most of the above information regarding wells A and B to Mr. Wilson, who was for many years gardener to the first lord Armstrong. He levelled and planted the site of well A and saw the above-named lead pipe laid.