

Ownership

[Bygone Bilsdale Review](#)

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This is an edited version of a larger note which is currently being researched further before being incorporated here

Sources

1. *a History of the County of York North Riding Volume 1 1914 Parishes: Helmsley pages 485-505* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/yorks/north/vol1/pp485-505>

- 1 ***A History of the County of York North Riding Volume 1 1914 Parishes: Helmsley pages 485-505***

Manors

Before the Conquest three thegns held 3½ carucates of land in HELMSLEY as two 'manors,' which by 1086 had come into the hands of the king. Another 'manor' of 8 carucates was held in the time of the Confessor by Ughtred, and this afterwards passed to the Count of Mortain, (fn. 24) who also had a 'manor' of 5 carucates in Harome and a 'manor' of 1 carucate in Pockley. On the attainder of William second Count of Mortain in 1106 (fn. 25) all this land came into the hands of the Crown, but before 1122 (the date of the founding of Kirkham Priory) it was in the possession of Walter Espec, and may have previously belonged to William Espec; for Warden in Bedfordshire, where Walter founded a Cistercian abbey in 1136, belonged in 1086 to William 'Spech,' and Bilsdale Church (fn. 26) was founded early in the 12th century by William 'the noble.' (fn. 27) Walter Espec was the foremost noble of his time in the northern counties. He was justice of the forests and justice itinerant of the northern counties under Henry I and commanded at the battle of the Standard on the English side in 1138. He died in about 1153, (fn. 28) but having no issue had alienated a great part of his estates in founding the monasteries of Kirkham and Rievaulx in Yorkshire and the house at Warden. (fn. 29) Aelred, the contemporary Abbot of Rievaulx, describes Walter Espec as an old man, keen, wise and loyal, of gigantic stature and build, with black hair, a long beard, a broad, open brow, large piercing eyes and sonorous voice. (fn. 30) A later ballad describes him at the battle of the Standard as 'large as the mountaine oake.' (fn. 31) His heirs were the sons of his three sisters Hawise, Aubrey and Odelina, married respectively into the families of Bussy, Trailly and Roos (Ros). Odelina by her husband Peter de Roos had sons Everard and Robert. (fn. 32) In 1157–8 Robert rendered account of 1,000 marks for the land of Walter Espec, (fn. 33) and confirmed the grants of Walter to Rievaulx Abbey for the souls of his father and his brother Everard. (fn. 34) Robert had a son Everard, (fn. 35) who was in 1166 a minor in the custody of the sheriff, (fn. 36) and in 1174–5 paid fine for his lands. (fn. 37) Everard left a son Robert called Furfan, (fn. 38) who had livery in 1190–1, (fn. 39) and built the castle of Helmsley. He was one of the twenty-five barons elected to ensure the observance of the Great Charter and withstood King John to the last. (fn. 40) He founded and endowed religious houses, and, assuming before his death the habit of the Templars, was buried in 1227 in the Temple Church, London, where his effigy may be seen. By his wife Isabel, illegitimate daughter of William the Lion of Scotland, he had a son and heir William, who died in 1258, leaving a son Robert. Robert

obtained Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire by his marriage with the heiress of William Daubeny and became the first Lord Roos (fn. 41) of Hamlake.

Roos of Hamlake. Gules three water bougets argent.

Robert died in 1285 and was succeeded by his son William, (fn. 42) whose son and heir William succeeded him in 1316, (fn. 43) and died February 1342–3, leaving a son and heir William. (fn. 44) In 1352 William died in the Holy Land and was succeeded by his brother Thomas, (fn. 45) who died on his way to Palestine in 1383, leaving a son and heir John. (fn. 46) This John, too, set out on crusade, and after his death in Cyprus in 1393 his remains were brought home to Rievaulx for burial. (fn. 47) He left no children and was succeeded by his brother William, (fn. 48) Lord Treasurer and one of the King's Council. (fn. 49) William died in 1414 and was succeeded first by his eldest son John, (fn. 50) and afterwards in 1421 by his second son Thomas, (fn. 51) who served in the French wars and died in 1430, leaving a son and heir Thomas. (fn. 52) Thomas took the Lancastrian side in the Wars of the Roses, was attainted in 1461 and beheaded in 1464 after the battle of Hexham. (fn. 53) His mother Eleanor, daughter of the Earl of Warwick, and now in her second widowhood, having married Edmund Duke of Somerset on the death of Lord Roos, (fn. 54) continued to hold the manor of Harome in dower, and Marjory, (fn. 55) widow of his uncle John, retained Helmsley Castle and manor in dower; but the reversion of these estates was in 1465 granted by the king to his brother George Duke of Clarence in fee. (fn. 56) Edmund son and heir of the attainted baron was restored in 1485, (fn. 57) and Sir Thomas Lovell, who had the governance of him and his estates, as he 'was not of sufficient discrecion to guyde himself and his lyvelode,' (fn. 58) held the castle and manor of Helmsley. (fn. 59) Edmund died unmarried in 1508 and was succeeded by Sir George Manners, son of his sister Eleanor. (fn. 60) This nephew fell sick and died at the siege of Tournay in 1513, leaving a son and heir Thomas, created Earl of Rutland in 1525. Thomas died in 1543 and was succeeded by his son Henry, (fn. 61) who as a supporter of the Duke of Northumberland was imprisoned at Queen Mary's accession, but was soon restored to her favour. (fn. 62) He died in 1563 and was succeeded by his son Edward, (fn. 63) the third earl, who after holding many other offices was in 1587 designated Lord Chancellor, but only survived the preceding Chancellor two days. (fn. 64) At his death his only child Elizabeth was aged eleven. (fn. 65) His brother John, the fourth earl, (fn. 66) succeeded him at Helmsley and died in 1587–8, leaving a son and heir Roger, (fn. 67) who married the daughter of Sir Philip Sidney. In 1600–1 he was implicated in the plot of the Earl of Essex and imprisoned in the Tower. (fn. 68) Roger entertained James I at Belvoir Castle in his progress to London in 1603 (fn. 69) ; he died childless in 1612 and was succeeded by his brother Francis. (fn. 70) In 1616 the claim of Francis to the ancient barony of Roos was disallowed in favour of his cousin William Cecil, the heir general, but he was in compensation declared to be 'Lord Roos of Hamlake whose son and heir should be called Lord Roos of Hamlake, Trusbutt and Belvoir.' On the death of his cousin two years later, however, Francis became the heir general to the old barony. (fn. 71) He died in 1632, leaving an only daughter Katharine Duchess of Buckingham and Lady Roos, his brother George the seventh Earl of Rutland being his heir male. (fn. 72) George made a conveyance of the Helmsley estates in 1634, (fn. 73) but Helmsley descended with the Roos barony (fn. 74) to Katharine's son, George Villiers Duke of Buckingham, whose younger brother, 'the beautiful Francis Villiers,' (fn. 75) made a conveyance of this estate in 1648. (fn. 76) Francis was slain on the Royalist side in a skirmish near Kingston, Surrey, in this year, (fn. 77) and George lost his estates through fighting on the king's side. (fn. 78) The castle, manor, borough of Helmsley and advowson of the church, the manors of Rievaulx, Wombleton, Harome, Pockley, Beadlam, Sproxtton, Carlton,

Cowhouse, and the three Bilsdales, all described as the possessions of Francis Villiers, esq., were in 1650 granted to the Commonwealth commander-in-chief, Sir Thomas Fairfax, and his heirs, (fn. 79) but George Duke of Buckingham recovered these estates by his marriage with Mary, only child of Sir Thomas Fairfax, seven years later. (fn. 80) He was the fifth and last duke, famous for his extravagance and profligacy, and died without legitimate issue in 1687. (fn. 81) Dryden satirized him in the well-known passage in *Absalom and Achitophel*, where Buckingham appears as 'Zimri':

'A man so various that he seem'd to be Not one, but all mankind's epitome; Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong, Was everything by starts, and nothing long; But, in the course of one revolving moon, Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon.' (fn. 82)

An Act of Parliament was passed in 1689 for enabling his trustees to sell the Helmsley and other estates to pay his debts, (fn. 83) and in 1695 these trustees conveyed all the manors in this parish with the castle and borough to Charles Duncombe and others. (fn. 84)

'And Helmsley, once proud Buckingham's delight, Slides to a scrivener or a city-knight,' (fn. 85)

for Sir Charles Duncombe was a London banker.

Sir Charles died childless in 1711, (fn. 86) and these estates passed to his sister Mary, wife of Thomas Browne, who with her husband assumed the name of Duncombe. Thomas son of Mary 'of Duncombe Park formerly Helmsley' died in 1745–6, leaving two sons, Thomas, who died in 1779 leaving only daughters, and Charles Slingsby Duncombe, who succeeded his brother and died in 1803. Charles his son was created Lord Feversham in 1826 and died in 1841, leaving a son and heir William, who died in 1867, and was succeeded by his son William Ernest Duncombe, the present owner, created Viscount Helmsley and Earl of Feversham in 1868. (fn. 87)

Robert Roos, who was lord of Helmsley from 1258 to 1285, claimed *jura regalia* in Helmsley, and the Constable of Helmsley Castle was accused of preventing the king's bailiff holding his wapentake court. (fn. 88) Robert claimed gallows at Helmsley and other places from the Conquest and produced the charter of Henry II to Everard Roos granting him the lands of Robert his father with infangentheof in all his lands. He also claimed the fines under the assize of bread and ale at Helmsley because he had a market there, and stated that his predecessors had had free warren there from the Conquest. (fn. 89) His free court of Helmsley is mentioned in 1285, when the yearly toll of the market was worth £11. (fn. 90) This market must have fallen into desuetude, for in 1670 Charles II granted a weekly market and three fairs to George Duke of Buckingham. (fn. 91) The market is still held, but since the opening of the railway the day has been altered from Saturday to Friday. Fairs are now held on 19 May, 16 July, 1 and 2 October and 5 and 6 November for cattle, sheep and horses.

No mention of *BILSDALE* (Bildesdale, xiii-xiv cent.; Billesdale, xiii-xvi cent.) occurs in Domesday Book, where it was probably surveyed under Helmsley. (fn. 92) A church was founded here by William 'the noble,' probably William Espec, (fn. 93) and Bilsdale was in 1145 given by Walter Espec to Rievaulx Abbey. (fn. 94) A manor here, which was evidently not included in this grant, belonged in the middle of the 13th century to Simon de Ver; his son Simon sold it in about 1274 to the neighbouring house of Kirkham, which held it of Robert de Roos in 1284–5. (fn. 95) Both Bilsdale Rievaulx and Bilsdale Kirkham were granted after the Dissolution to the Earl of Rutland, (fn. 96) and have followed the descent of Helmsley.