

## EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Helmsley Castle: twelfth century ringwork, twelfth to fourteenth century enclosure castle and sixteenth century mansion

PARISH: HELMSLEY

DISTRICT: RYEDALE

COUNTY: NORTH YORKSHIRE

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 13278

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): SE61098365

### DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

Helmsley Castle is situated in the town of Helmsley on an outcrop overlooking the River Rye. The monument consists of a single area which includes the twelfth century ringwork and its outer rampart, the twelfth to fourteenth century stone castle and the sixteenth century mansion house. The earliest castle at Helmsley was the rectangular ringwork built by Walter Espec in the 1120s. Orientated north-west to south-east, and enclosing an inner bailey measuring c.90m by c.65m, this consisted of two massive earthwork banks divided by deep ditches and crowned by timber palisades. The entrance was on the north-west side, beyond which lay the outer bailey. The outer bailey is now located beneath a carpark but one bank is still visible, running north for c.80m. The sheer size of the ringwork indicates that it was the centre of Espec's estates and would therefore have contained important domestic buildings suitable for serving and accommodating the lord and his family and guests. The remains of these buildings will survive within the inner bailey, while those of such ancillary buildings as stables, workshops and lodgings for retainers are thought to have been located in the outer bailey.

The castle was rebuilt in stone some time after 1186 by Robert de Roos Fursan, when the inner bank of the ringwork was levelled and a curtain wall with round corner towers built in its place. Although only the lower courses remain standing, the curtain was originally some 4.6m high and carried a wall walk reached via a stair to the south of the east tower. Subsidiary gates, known as sallyports, through which the garrison could rush to defend the castle from attack, lead through the curtain onto a berm overlooking the inner ditch and indicate the existence of timber outworks. Also at this time, the north gate was strengthened by the addition of two round towers, and a new gate, set beneath a square tower, was built in the south-east corner and became the new main entrance into the inner bailey. Great towers were built midway along both the west and east curtains and a new outer bailey was created to the south-east of the castle to replace the now defunct outer bailey on the north side. The great east tower was originally bow-fronted and consisted of a vaulted basement with a single room above housing the castle chapel. Access was from the wall walk to north and south and traces of twelfth century crenellations are preserved in later masonry. The twelfth century west tower comprised a barrel-vaulted basement with two storeys above and contained the lord's private quarters. These connected with a hall to the north. The

tower's mullioned and transomed windows date to the sixteenth century. A new chapel was built and consecrated in 1246. However, the next major phase of building was carried out by Fursan's grandson, Robert, who remodelled the south gate and added barbicans to the north and south gates. The north barbican was a simple structure with an outer gate flanked by drum towers and walls extending back over the bank between the two ditches. The south barbican, however, was more substantial and comprised an outer gatehouse, also flanked by drum towers, but with a curtain wall extending to either side and ending in round-fronted towers. All the towers were open-backed, which is typical of the mid-thirteenth century, and the outer ditch was realigned and the abutment for a massive drawbridge constructed. In the sixteenth century, the south barbican was rebuilt to serve as the gatehouse, contributing to its present appearance. In the fourteenth century, walls were built across the inner ditch to join the south barbican to the main defences of the castle.

Doors in these walls provided access to the ditch.

The main period of rebuilding was in the fourteenth century when Robert's son, William, completely remodelled the castle's defences and its domestic accommodation. This involved strengthening the south barbican and providing accommodation for men-at-arms, creating new accommodation by raising the east tower to its present three storeys and adding a turreted parapet, and providing a new hall with kitchen and service rooms in the south-west corner of the inner bailey. The new hall joined the west tower, which was refurbished for the lord and his family and now had fireplaces and garderobes on each floor. Meanwhile, the doorways formerly linking the west tower with the twelfth century hall were blocked and a wall was built dividing the inner bailey in two, providing separate areas of accommodation for the lord's family and that of his steward. Lodgings for retainers and a garderobe tower were built north of the twelfth century hall, and a bakehouse and brewery were built in the north-east corner. This was the form of the castle until the 1560s when the domestic ranges were replaced by Edward Manners and a house built in the shell of the west tower and twelfth century hall. The Tudor mansion has survived largely unaltered and includes the remains of sixteenth century interiors showing there to have been one large and two smaller rooms on the ground floor and two rooms on the first floor which, from their surviving decor, appear to have been reception rooms. Further chambers were built above the old garderobe tower. In addition, the thirteenth century chapel was converted to a kitchen and joined to the house by a covered passage.

Although very well-defended, Helmsley Castle had no major strategic function and owes its location to the town being at the centre of the Espec and de Roos estates. It remained with the de Roos family until 1478 when it was sold to Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later Richard III. On Richard's death, however, it reverted to Edmund de Roos and passed, on his death in 1508, to Sir George Manners. It then descended through the Manners family until 1632 when it passed to George Villiers, first Duke of Buckingham, as the dowry of his wife Katharine Manners. Villiers, however, appears never to have lived at Helmsley and, though it was held for the Royalists during the Civil War, it was surrendered to Parliament in November 1644 and subsequently slighted. The second Duke of Buckingham came to live in the house in 1687, but died in 1688 when it was sold to Charles Duncombe. The Duncombes, however, abandoned the site of the castle in favour of the present Duncombe Park. The castle has been in State care since 1915 and is also a Grade I Listed Building.

A number of features within the constraint area are excluded from the scheduling. These are all English Heritage fixtures such as bridges, gangways, notices, ticket kiosk and grilles, the stairs and gate by the ticket kiosk, the surface and fixtures of the carpark, the surfaces of all paths, all modern walling and fencing, a telegraph pole and various sheds, lean-tos and other fixtures on the north and north-west sides and a small building on the north side of the carpark. The ground beneath all these exclusions is, however, included.

## ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Ringworks are medieval fortifications built and occupied from the late Anglo-Saxon period to the later 12th century. They comprised a small defended area containing buildings which was surrounded or partly surrounded by a substantial ditch and a bank surmounted by a timber palisade or, rarely, a stone wall. Occasionally a more lightly defended embanked enclosure, the bailey, adjoined the ringwork. Ringworks acted as strongholds for military operations and in some cases as defended aristocratic or manorial settlements. They are rare nationally with only 200 recorded examples and less than 60 with baileys. As such, and as one of a limited number and very restricted range of Anglo-Saxon and Norman fortifications, ringworks are of particular significance to our understanding of the period.

The enclosure castle is a defended residence or stronghold, built mainly of stone, in which the principal or sole defence comprises the walls and towers bounding the site. Some form of keep may have stood within the enclosure but this was not significant in defensive terms and served mainly to provide accommodation. Larger sites might have more than one line of walling and there are normally mural towers and gatehouses. Outside the walls a ditch, either waterfilled or dry, crossed by bridges may be found.

The first enclosure castles were constructed at the time of the Norman Conquest. However they developed considerably in form during the 12th century when defensive experience gained during the Crusades was applied to their design. The majority of examples were constructed in the 13th century. While a few were reconstructions of earlier medieval earthwork castles of the motte and bailey type, others were new creations. They provided strongly defended residences for the king or leading families and occur in both urban and rural situations.

Enclosure castles are widely dispersed throughout England, with a slight concentration in Kent and Sussex supporting a vulnerable coast and a strong concentration along the Welsh border where some of the best examples were built under Edward I. They are rare nationally with only 126 recorded examples. Considerable diversity of form is exhibited with no two examples being exactly alike. As with other castle types, they are major medieval monument types, belonging to the highest levels of society which frequently acted as major administrative centres and formed the foci for developing settlement patterns.

Castles generally provide an emotive and evocative link to the past and can provide a valuable educational resource, both with respect to medieval warfare and defence and with respect to wider aspects of medieval society. All examples retaining significant remains of medieval date are considered to be nationally important.

Helmsley Castle is an important and unusually substantial example of a twelfth century ringwork which developed into an enclosure castle of equally atypical form. The construction of two great towers, for example, instead of a single keep, is an especially uncommon feature for the period. In addition to the good state of preservation of all its standing remains, the castle is important for providing an almost complete picture of construction and modification from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Changes relating both to its fortifications and to fashions in domestic arrangements are well represented, showing in particular the late medieval shift from communal life to greater privacy and domestic comfort. Further remains, particularly of timber buildings, are believed to survive throughout the site.

## SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument included in the Schedule on 8th February 1915 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Yorkshire 17  
NAME: Helmsley Castle

Monument amended on 1st April 1974 to:  
COUNTY/NUMBER: North Yorkshire 17  
NAME: Helmsley Castle

The reference of this monument is now:  
NATIONAL MONUMENT NUMBER: 13278  
NAME: Helmsley Castle: twelfth century ringwork, twelfth to fourteenth century enclosure castle and sixteenth century mansion

SCHEDULING REVISED ON 11th March 1992