

Is there a Hermitage on Black Rake?



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Front cover and photographic plates by Arthur Batty.

Is there a Hermitage in Blackrake?

Recent research being carried out by members of Ingleborough Archaeology Group concerning Boundary Perambulations has raised the possibility of a second Hermitage in Black Rake, that at one point seemed to be confused with one described in “*The Hermitage*” (Batty and Crack, 2009). After a recent meeting at Westhouse Village Hall, Helen Sergeant kindly lent us transcripts of three boundary perambulations she had copied from the *Ingleborough Estate Records* at Northallerton and has given her permission to use the descriptions in this publication. The transcripts are:-

- The Boundaries of the Manor of Dent (1572)
- The Boundaries of the Manor of Newby (1683)
- The Boundaries of the Higher division of the Manor of Newby 1739 mentioning “*a place called Hermitage House*”.

When looking at previously written articles it is easy to see where confusion has arisen regarding a proposed hermitage in Black Rake. Mary Higham, (1992) studying the Assize Roll of 1203/4 relates that this refers to an agreement in the Coucher book of Furness Abbey (¹Brownbill, 1916) between William de Mowbray and Adam de Stavelay, regarding the forest of Burton in Lonsdale and the Forest of Mewith where it is stated that “*....et heremitorium remanebit vastum...*” (and the hermitage shall remain waste). Higham continues by stating that the precise location of the hermitage, as referred to in a Selside charter c.1190, (²Brownbill, 1916)* is not easy to locate, but speculates that it was at NGR SD 788 817 (near Gate Cote) or SD 784 813 (Hazel Gill) and mentions that these sites are “*close to two early route ways - Black Rake Road which leads into Deepdale, and the Roman road over Cam Fell ...*”. Unfortunately these locations are not mentioned in Boundary perambulations for Southerscales and Selside on their return to the summit of Ingleborough. Higham does link the pastures however, to land in Southerscales (Higham pp 139) and referring to the site at Gauber (proposed by Batty and Crack as ‘the Hermitage’) states “*that such ‘native’ sites really belong to the Norse/Irish expansion of the area because of the coins found in the wall when the site was excavated*” (ibid pp 142). The excavation mentioned in Higham’s article was carried out by Mr. A King (King, 1978).

*Higham’s reference quotes charter as c 1190. Reference on pp 340 in Coucher Book is for charter dated 1220. In this charter the Hermitage is referred to as ‘*domum heremite.*’ in the Selside boundaries and ‘*heremythous*’ in Souterscales perambulation. The charter referred to by Higham is on pp 334 of the Coucher Book.

In “The Chapel in the Fells (Tyler, 2003) further confusion has arisen about a Hermitage in Black Rake. Tyler suggests that there are references in the Yorkshire Assize Rolls for 1203/4 to a hermitage on Blea Moor somewhere above High Gayle Farm and that ..

“a combination of reference points mentioned in the old documents and local geography appears to suggest that it was once located on a level limestone shelf beside a watercourse on Black Rake Road, an ancient trackway leading to Dentdale and the North.” As shown in the preceding paragraph the old documents do not suggest that it was on Black Rake, but states that it is between the end of Langhals and Mossdale Beck as stated in several perambulations in “The Hermitage” (Batty and Crack, 2009).

The confusion is understandable as the document in the Assize Roll does not give the perambulations, but is an agreement of land usage within the Forest of Burton in Lonsdale. Part of the document relates to pastures in Souterscales - *“Preterea sciendum quod tres vaccarie, scilicet Qwerside, Souterskales et Burbladthwait remaneant prefato Ade et heredibus suis cum bosco, pratis et pasturis et omnibus suis pertinentiis;....et heremitorium remanebit vastum...”* (¹Brownbill, 1916) (Further more it is to be known that the **three cow-pastures**, namely Whernside, Souterscales and Burbladthwait (?) are to remain with the aforesaid Adam and his heirs together with the wood, meadows and pastures and all things pertaining to them; and the hermitage shall remain waste....). It is not clear where these cow pastures are, apart from the fact that they were granted to Adam de Stavely and his heirs. We can speculate that the ‘*Souterskales*’ (Souterscales) cow pasture would be located where it is today; the cow pasture named ‘*Qwerside*’ has to be good pasture land on the eastern side of Whernside, and there is no evidence as to where ‘*Burbladthwait*’ is located. The Coucher Book Index (³Brownbill, 1919) has it listed simply as ‘pasture’. It is not very likely however that any of these lands, being cow pastures, would be in the middle of Black Rake which is a quagmire.

During discussions and conversations there has been some speculation that a pile of stones on the Ordnance Survey Leisure Map 2 (Yorkshire Dales - West) Grid Ref: SD 787 829 is the remains of the Hermitage in Black Rake. Two members of the group went to investigate this theory for the purpose of this publication. On examining this location it was clear that this (very small) pile of stones is the remains of a wall shown on the map that now no longer exists. This linear feature continues, westward across Blea Moor Hill on a line where there

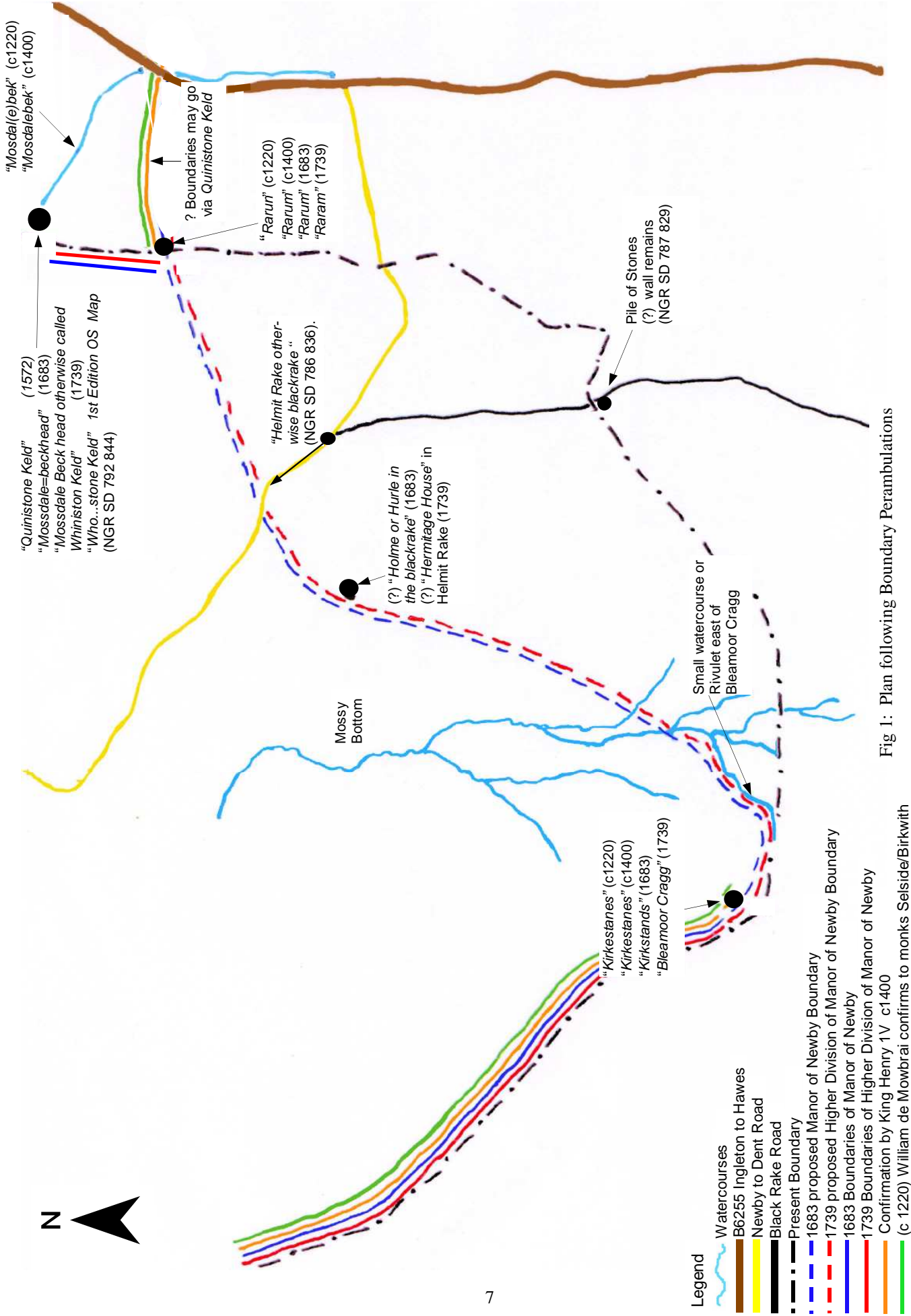


Fig 1: Plan following Boundary Perambulations

is now a wire fence. (*Plate 1*). The wall can be picked up again on the eastern side of Black Rake road, where a further 50 m (approx) of this wall remains can be seen. (*Plate 2*).

The best way to look for a feature mentioned in the boundary perambulations is to study the various place names in the documents to see if they fit the position of the feature and look at the landscape for evidence. Listed below are 4 perambulations shown by the coloured lines on the plan Fig 1 on page 6. For readers who would like to investigate for themselves, these lines follow the places mentioned in the perambulations. Any uncertainties about place names and/or routes will be followed by a (?) to indicate our plan is speculative. It also must be emphasised here, that the broken red and blue line is a proposed boundary line taken from places mentioned in 1683 and 1739 perambulations. This route avoids Mossy Bottom that goes down steeply towards Dent. The proposed route also stays near the watershed. The 1220 and a Henry 1V document mentions no other places between Kirkestanes and Rarum but there is no reason why the same route above could not be followed.

(1) William de Mowbrai confirms to the monks Selside and Birkwith, Newby, South Scales” (c1220) coloured green on the map. (⁴*Brownbill, 1916*)

“...et inde per directum usque ad Kirkestanes et sic usque Rarun, deinde ad capud de Mosdalebek et sic usque ad heremythous.....”

“.....from there directly as far a Kirkestanes and thus up to Rarun and thus as far as the head of Mosdalebek and thus as far as the hermit house”.

(2) A charter of Confirmation by King Henry 1V* of previous Royal and Other Charters. (Atkinson, ed., 1886) coloured orange on the map.

This charter lists the boundary perambulations of ‘*Selessset*’ (Selside) and Birkwith, and the Southerscales perambulation that goes from the top of Ingleborough down Meregill through Ellerbeck to the Summit of Whernside, down the eastern side of Whernside ...

“et inde per directum usque ad Kirkestanes, et sic usque Rarum, [et] deinde ad capud de Mosedalebek et sic usque ad Heremitehous”

“....then directly to Kirkestones and then onto Rarum and to the head of Mosedalebek and then to the Hermitage...”

then follows the Selside boundary back to the summit of Ingleborough.

(3) Boundaries of the Manor of Newby (1683) (coloured blue on the map).

*Date of this Charter not known but Henry 1V reigned from (1399-1413)

.... from thence overthwart the head of Littledale unto Kirkstands called the Cragg of Bleamoor where again we repaired a mark or ancient meer from thence to the Holme or Hurlle in the Blackrake from thence unto Rarum and thence to Mossdale=beckhead all those abutting and abounding upon the Lord or Lords of Dent from thence to the Forest of the Earl of Richmond.....

This charter is interesting as it mentions the Boundary of Newby 463 years after the 1220 perambulation above that, by the time of this perambulation, incorporates Southerscales and Selside. It also makes clear how the boundary division on Blea Moor Cragg is a very ancient division as they repaired an “ancient meer”.

(4) The Boundaries of Higher Division of the Manor of Newby (1739) - coloured red on the map.

.... from the Head of Littledale then up Bleamoor and Eastward to another Pike or Hurdle of Stones above the last mentioned and so directly up to Bleamoor Cragg then across the Moss Eastward and down by a small watercourse or Rivulet to a Hurdle of Stones at a place called Hermitage House in Helmit Rake otherwise blackrake from thence North East directly upon Raram Rigg to Mossdale Beck head otherwise Whiniston Keld and so to the corner of Wensleydale fields formerly called Richmond Forrest”

Conclusions

After reading these perambulations and looking at the locations of the places in these perambulations on the plan it will be noticed that no Hermitage is mentioned in the Black Rake area in the perambulation of 1220; the confirmation from the reign of Henry IV; and the 1683 Boundary of Newby, it is only mentioned in the 1739 perambulation, some 519 years later than the 1220 grant. Looking at the 1739 perambulation more closely on the plan (line in red) from the top of the “Cragg of Bleamoor (Plate 3). then across the moss eastward” (up to this point it follows today’s boundary) and “**down by a small watercourse or Rivulet**” (Plate 4) (at this point it diverts off the modern boundary in a north-easterly direction) “to a Hurdle of Stones at a place called Hermitage House in **Helmit Rake otherwise blackrake**” (Plate 5).

Here it should be noted that Helmit Rake is “**otherwise blackrake**”. This seems to have been totally overlooked by others in this perambulation. **Helm** can translate to a “*helmet, or summit of a hill*”, (Smith, 1956); “*protection, defence, covering, crown; summit, top (of trees) or helmiht, leafy* (Clark Hall, 1894); a crown, the top, overshadowing foliage of

trees; thorns or *helmiht*, full of leaves or boughs (*Bosworth and Toller*). A 'Rake' fits well with this point (NGR SD 786 836) where Black Rake road turns to the north west, joins the Newby to Dent road then goes down steeply into Dentdale (*Plate 6*). In other words the steep, head of Black Rake. Although there are no trees here now, the name implies that, in 1739, trees **may** have lined the road. Near this point there is a Hurdle of Stones (*Plate 7*) (NGR SD 782 836) i.e Blea Moor Stones on the modern O.S. map. This is the point we think is "*a place called Hermitage House.*" in the 1739 perambulation. The perambulation continues (*Plate 8*) "*from then North East directly upon Raram.*". It will be noticed that in the 1683 perambulation this place is referred to as "*..... the Holme or Hurle in the blackrake*". There is no mention of a hermitage.

The 13th century and Henry 1V perambulations do not mention a Hermitage house or a hermitage at the same point as the 1739 boundary, but do mention a Hermitage in the Southerscales and Selside Boundary perambulations after going over Rarum and after Mosedalebek - this being the Hermitage site proposed by Batty and Crack (*ibid*). We cannot be certain that earlier perambulations follow the same route as the two later perambulations and this could be the reason for no mention of a hermitage at the point between Blea Moor Cragg and Rarum in the earlier documents. (We don't rule out the possibility of two hermitages but, as yet, there is no evidence for two existing concurrently). The 1683 perambulation mentions only a hurle of stones at the 1739 location of the Hermitage House.

There is however a perambulation from **1572 - The Boundaries of the Manor of Dent** (the third transcribed by Helen Sergeant) that refers to a burned house (*...up the South End of the Christian Cragg and so over the Moor the Rawntree in the Blackrake and so the burned house and so the Quinistone Keld and through Swinly Cowen* ". This perambulation is not easy to follow precisely, as I do not know the location Rawntree (any information will be appreciated). Swinly Cowen is on the modern OS map at NGR SD 794 857 (Swinley Cowm) and we have located Quinistone Keld to a spring (unmarked) on the modern OS Map at NGR SD 792 844. On the 1851 OS Map of Yorkshire there is a spring at this location called Who...stone Keld. Therefore, the burned house has to be between '*Blackrake*' and '*Quinistone Keld*'. Could the burned house be the same location as the point mentioned in 1683 as '*holme or hurle in blackrake*' and in 1739 as 'Hermitage House'? If this is the same position then, significantly, in 1572 it is a '*burned house*' not a hermitage. Is it

possible that the 1739 '*Hermitage House*' represents the dwelling of a recluse living in the ruins of the 1572 '*burned house*', and creating a legend of a hermit? It is highly unlikely that any religious type hermitage was established after the 1536 and 1539 Suppression Acts leading to the dissolution of the Monasteries in 1540. The English Heritage website (see bibliography) points out that hermitages in monastic control were confiscated at the Dissolution and secular ones even earlier, with bridge and road chapels lasting up to 1569. It may be possible that a dissident monk could have occupied a small cell after this time, but then we would have expected the 1572 boundary to have it as a hermitage or hermit's house.

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To summarise we have shown

- That the pile of stones mentioned on page 6 is not the remains of a dwelling, but is the remnants of an old field wall.
- That the Hermitage House said to be in '*Helmit Rake otherwise blackrake*' in 1739 is not mentioned in any earlier perambulations.
- That Helmit Rake is a specific part of Black Rake Road.
- There is no evidence for the establishment, or continuation of religious hermitages after the reformation.

Ongoing research may bring to light more conclusive evidence for another monastic-based hermitage, but from the evidence above we conclude that there is no religious hermitage on Black Rake. If anyone has any constructive remarks to make, that can add to the weight of evidence (for or against), we would be interested to hear your opinions and your thoughts on our proposals.



Plate 1: Wall remains at NGR SD 787 839 showing linear feature going westwards towards Blea Moor Crag.



Plate 2: Remains of wall on eastern side of Black Rake Road. Black Rake Road is in the middle distance near a gate that can just be seen along the wire fence.



Plate 3: At the Hurdle of stones looking back south-west towards Blea Moor Crag.



Plate 4: Rivulet coming down from southern end of Blea Moor Crag.



Plate 5: From Black Rake Road looking south-west.



Plate 6: 'Helmit Rake' (?) going down into Dentdale. NGR SD 786 836.



Plate 7: The hurdle of stones (NGR SD 782 836).



Plate 8: From the Hurdle of stones, looking north-east towards 'Raram'

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²Brownbill, J. (ed.), *The Coucher Book of Furness Abbey Vol 11 Part 11* The Chetham Society Vol 76, pp 340 (See also footnote on page 5).

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