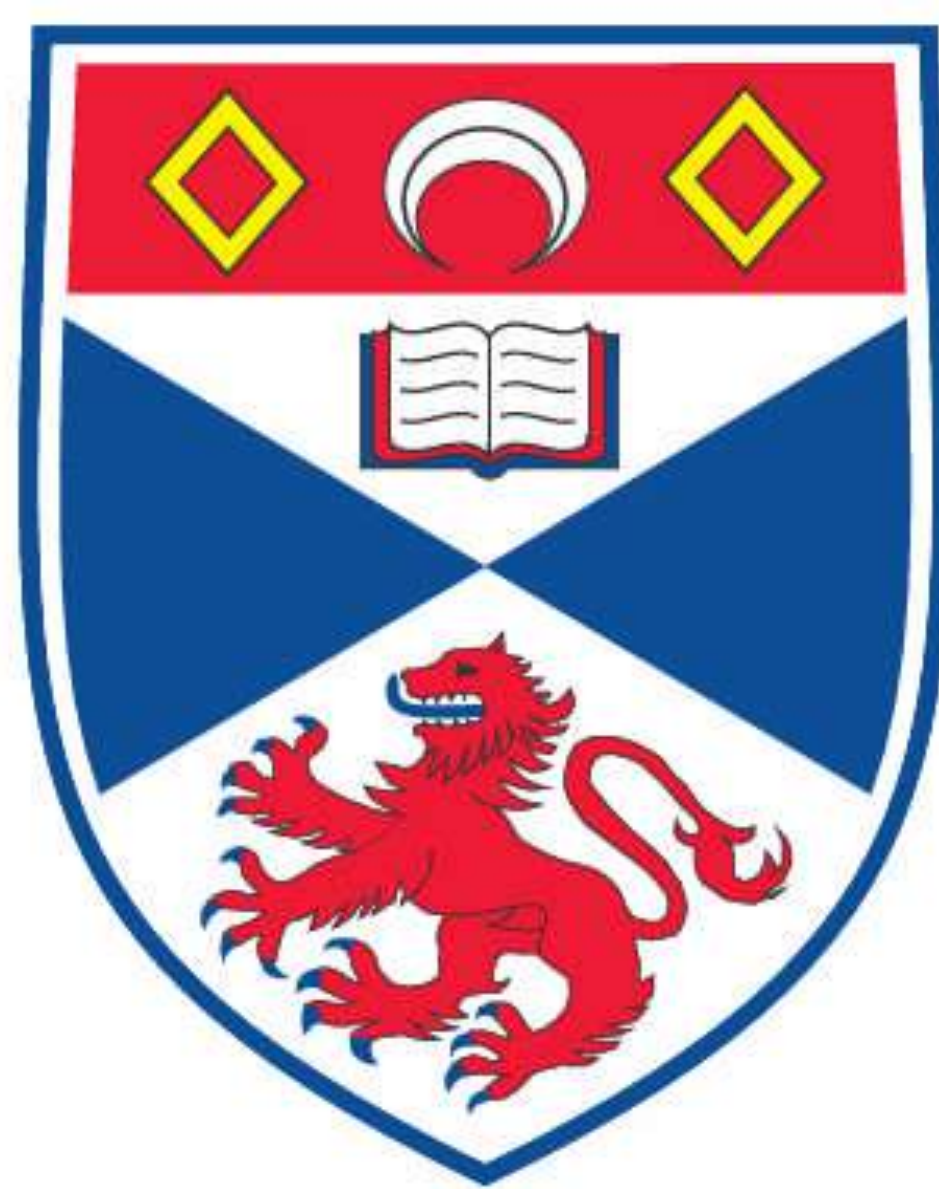


**THE DE VERDUN FAMILY IN ENGLAND, IRELAND AND WALES,
1066-1316: A STUDY**

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over the church of Skeffington.³⁰³ Between 12 April and 9 May 1221 de Verdun brought a suit against William de Bradeshull over half a virgate in *Bradeshull*, (Buckinghamshire) William subsequently acknowledging Nicholas' right to it.³⁰⁴

The records of these pleas do not provide enough information to make any sort of judgement as to whether Nicholas was a particularly litigious individual, or whether he was careless of the rights of others. What is clear, however, is that Nicholas, along with a great number of his contemporaries, frequently found himself at law both in England and Ireland - especially from 1219-20 onwards. Indeed, he was involved in a plea against Peter of Lutterworth over a virgate with appurtenances in Lutterworth in the Easter term of 1231,³⁰⁵ just a few months before his death which had occurred by 23 October of the same year.³⁰⁶

Roesia de Verdun 1231-47.

Little is known of Roesia de Verdun's life prior to her inheritance of the de Verdun estates. However, it is clear that she had been married at least twice already as the charter she gave to Grace Dieu in 1231x41 mentions her husbands, amongst others, as intended spiritual beneficiaries of the grant.³⁰⁷ The identity of her first husband is unknown, but he must have died before 4 September 1225 when Henry III sent a letter to Roesia urging her to marry Theobald II Butler³⁰⁸ (also called Theobald Walter in contemporary sources) the heir to the lordship of Nenagh in county Tipperary, who had previously been married to Geoffrey de Marisco's daughter.³⁰⁹ Roesia may have been reluctant to do this, as Henry sent another letter to her father asking him to encourage her to make the match.³¹⁰

³⁰³ *CRR*, 8, pp. 161, 222, 339. Nicholas must have won, because the family still had the right of presentation to this church in 1316. (*CIPM*, 6, no. 54.)

³⁰⁴ M. W. Hughes, *A Calendar of the Feet of Fines from the County of Buckingham 7 Richard I-44 Henry III*, Records Branch of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 4 (1940), p. 45.

³⁰⁵ *CRR*, 14, no. 1374.

³⁰⁶ *CCR*, 1227-31, p. 572.

³⁰⁷ *Monasticon* 6/1, p. 567.

³⁰⁸ *RLC*, 2, p. 60.

³⁰⁹ "[Theobald Walter] has so misconducted himself in regard to the king, that although he has married the justiciary's (Geoffrey de Marisco's) daughter, and has by her a son, the justiciary would, if it is the king's will, deprive him of all the land which he holds of the king in Ireland." (*CDI*, 1, no. 1443.) This notice dates to about August 1226, so that Geoffrey's comments must relate to a past marriage.

³¹⁰ *RLC*, 2, p. 60.

Nicholas was apparently successful in this as Roesia did indeed marry Theobald Butler and had at least two children by him, a son, John, and a daughter, Matilda. John was to inherit the de Verduns' lands from his mother, having already adopted her toponym at least five years before her death and his career is discussed below. Matilda, who might have been married to Walter II de Lacy before his death between 1238 and 1241,³¹¹ had married John fitzAlan by 1242, the marriage being first noted in a fine of that year in which "Roesia de Verdun gave the king 50 marks for a certain writ so that she is not distrained for money by those executors of the will of John fitzAlan." This mentions John, John fitzAlan's son, "who married the daughter of the said Roesia."³¹² Matilda was to outlive her husband and went on to marry Richard d'Amundeville before her death in 1284.³¹³ The inquisition *post mortem* made after her death records that she had held land in eight manors in dower in Wiltshire, Shropshire and Sussex along with three Sussex hundreds.³¹⁴ To this can be added 100s. of land in dower in Chipping Norton in Gloucestershire which she had held in 1283 and, perhaps, the fee of William Jaye in Jaye in Shropshire which she had claimed to hold in dower in the same year.³¹⁵

Theobald Butler died in Poitou in 1230 and orders were given for Roesia to be assigned dower from his lands, with the custody of "the lands and heirs of Theobald Walter, and the marriage of the heirs" being given to Richard of Cornwall, Henry III's brother.³¹⁶ There is no record of what Roesia received in Ireland, but the fact that these orders were also sent to the justiciary of Ireland suggests that she did hold something in dower there. At least some of the dower lands that Roesia de Verdun claimed in England are identified in a plea of 1233. In this, it is stated that Roesia "who was the wife of Theobald Butler petitions against Roger de Quency of a third part of the manors of Whiteheton and Merton with appurtenances in county Lancashire, and a third of the manor of Shipley (Yorkshire)... and a third of the manor of Belawe (Norfolk)... and a third of a £4 rent... from the manor of Perham (Suffolk)... as her dower."³¹⁷ The outcome of the

³¹¹ The Register of St Thomas' abbey records that an unnamed daughter of Roesia's had married Walter II de Lacy at an unspecified date. As Roesia is not known to have had any other daughters, Matilda is the likeliest candidate. (*Register*, p. 420.)

³¹² *Excerpta é Rot. Finium in Turri Londinensi Asservati Henrico Tertio Rege, 1216-72*, cd. C. Roberts, Record Commission (London, 1835), 1, p. 387.

³¹³ *CIPM*, 2, no. 489.

³¹⁴ *ibid*, no. 536.

³¹⁵ *CCR*, 1279-88, p. 213; *CIPM*, 2, no. 489.

³¹⁶ *CCR*, 1227-31, p. 572; *CDI*, 1, nos. 1845, 1847.

³¹⁷ *CRR*, 15, no. 372.

plea is not known, but as it does not arise again presumably some settlement was reached.

As a widow, Roesia had her own independent legal identity which would be retained provided that she did not marry again. She could inherit and administer her lands and bring law suits against those who infringed her rights - as indeed she did throughout her career in both England and Ireland.³¹⁸ Consequently, when Nicholas de Verdun died in 1231, Roesia was no helpless heiress to be taken into the king's wardship and married at will, but was able to inherit her patrimony in her own right. So it was that on 23 October 1231 it was recorded in the fine rolls that, "Roesia, daughter and heir of Nicholas de Verdun, made with the king a fine of 700 marks for her relief, that she may have seisin of her father's lands at his death which belong to her by right of inheritance and that she may not be constrained to marry."³¹⁹ She was also "to have peace of the demands which are made to her for the debts of that Nicholas [de Verdun]," which Nicholas' executors, Walter, abbot of Croxden, and Robert of Wootton were busy trying to pay off.³²⁰

In the first decade of her rule, Roesia founded the Augustinian nunnery of Grace Dieu near Belton in Leicestershire, granting it, in what seems to be a foundation charter, "the whole of my manor of Belton with the advowson of the church... and all other appurtenances and liberties which I or my ancestors once used to have in the same manor. Having and holding of me and my heirs in pure and perpetual alms."³²¹ Roesia may have founded this house as the result of a desire to equal her forebears. "The pride a founder took in a foundation was based on the knowledge that this action secured a certain social position with peers living and dead."³²² Some indication that Roesia did indeed see herself as in competition with her ancestors - and that this was therefore at least part of the motivation for the founding of Grace Dieu - is provided by the report of the construction of Castleroché in 1236 noted below. Whatever its cause, the foundation of Grace Dieu placed Roesia amongst a band of eighteen widows who independently founded nunneries across England between c.1076 and 1284, who included in their

³¹⁸ For example, *CDI*, 1, nos. 2029, 2276, 2446; *CCR*, 1231-4, p. 153; *CCR*, 1242-7, p. 237; *WS*, 4/1, pp. 102, 103, 111.

³¹⁹ *CDI*, 1, no. 1923; PRO, E372/76, memb. 1.

³²⁰ *Memoranda Rolls (Exchequer) Michaelmas 1231-Michaelmas 1233, Preserved in the Public Record Office*, ed. R. Allen Brown (London, 1991), nos. 1315, 44, 2610.

³²¹ *Monasticon*, 6/1, p. 567.

³²² J. A. Nichols, 'Why found a Medieval Cistercian Nunnery', *Medieval Prosopography*, 12/1 (1991), p.11.

number Margery, the widow of Bartholomew de Crek, who founded the nunnery at Flixham (Suffolk) in 1258-9, Herbusse de Clere who founded the Benedictine nunnery at Yedingham (Yorkshire) in 1158, after the death of her first husband and probably before her subsequent remarriage, and Margaret de Lacy who founded an Augustinian nunnery at Aconbury (Herefordshire) in 1216.³²³

Little is known of the history of Grace Dieu, although it is certain that the house was founded between 1231 and 1241, towards the end of the great period of monastic foundations, the later date being provided by a royal confirmation in the charter rolls of Roesia's grant of the manor of Belton to the nuns.³²⁴ The priory was established outside the village, where its fragmentary remains still stand in a field by the side of the road. Roesia subsequently made additional gifts to the priory. By 1242-3 the nuns held a third of a fee at Kirby in Lincolnshire "of the fee of Roesia de Verdun,"³²⁵ while the hundred rolls record that "the prioress of Grace Dieu holds two tofts and one bovat of the gift of Roesia de Verdun" at Burton, also in Lincolnshire.³²⁶ It is likely that Roesia had also granted the priory land at Great Limber in the same county where the nuns held the rents of assize, lands and tenants, as well as the farm of the manor, at the time of the Dissolution.³²⁷ Roesia thus alienated some of her more distant and isolated manors to the community but, despite this, the house was poor and struggling to the extent that in the early 1250's Adam Marsh wrote to Robert Grosseteste, the bishop of Lincoln, and to the archdeacons of Leicester and Oxford to enlist their help on behalf of the nuns.³²⁸

By 1246 Roesia de Verdun had also founded a Franciscan friary in Dundalk, at Seatown, of which the only remains are a late thirteenth-century tower.³²⁹ However, although Roesia founded these new houses, she also continued a family tradition of patronising the Cistercian abbey established at Croxden by her grandfather. Two original charters survive by which Roesia gave new possessions to the abbey. In the first of these Roesia quitclaimed to Croxden the rights which

³²³ S. Thompson, *Women Religious* (Oxford, 1991), appendix A, pp. 217-31. Aconbury was initially given to the Hospitallers but became a house of Augustinian nuns when Margaret discovered what the gift to the Hospitallers entailed. (*ibid*, pp. 50-1.)

³²⁴ *CChR*, 1, p. 265.

³²⁵ *BF*, p. 1110.

³²⁶ *Rot. Hundredorum*, 1, p. 242.

³²⁷ *Monasticon*, 6/1, p. 568.

³²⁸ *Monumenta Francisca*, 1, ed. J. S. Brewer, Rolls Series (London, 1858), pp. 115, 119, 130, 197-8, 403-4; S. Thompson, *Women Religious*, pp. 209-10.

³²⁹ A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland*, p. 249; V. M. Buckley and P. D. Sweetman, *Archaeological Survey of County Louth* (Dublin, 1991), no. 990.

she claimed in the wood of Hounds Cheadle (Staffordshire) within given bounds. In the second she granted the abbey "in pure and perpetual alms three bovates of land and a half with all their appurtenances in the vill of Hounds Cheadle and nine acres of land in *Lindencliff*.... After this I gave to the same monks the whole land which Alan of Lees held... in the land which is called *Lees*."³³⁰ A later law suit reveals that Roesia also granted the abbey a rent of 40s. per year from the mills at Alton, while the hundred rolls reveal a donation made to Croxden in 1244 of 6 virgates of land in Hartshorn, Derbyshire, where the abbey had been granted some property previously by Bertram III.³³¹ These grants to Croxden abbey, referred to by Roesia as "my abbey", suggest a strong feeling of family as well as of piety.

It might at first be thought that further evidence of Roesia's piety could be found in the direction to Adam de Spaldinton, who was given custody of Roesia's lands after her death, "to maintain a taper out of the issues of the manor of Wilsford, continually burning before the high altar of the church of Salisbury, as was done in Roesia's time."³³² However, the inquisition *post mortem* of 1274 makes it clear that this was the service by which the manor was held rather than an act of devotion.³³³ Although Wilsford and Stoke Farthing in Wiltshire first appear in de Verdun hands during Roesia's tenure of the family estates, they came to the family as a result of Nicholas de Verdun's marriage to Clementia Butler. This is revealed in a plea of 1243 in which Roesia claimed to hold Stoke Farthing as the heir of Philip Butler, the father of the said Clementia.³³⁴ It is also clear that *Stapellaunton*, which Roesia gave to her daughter in *maritagium*, came to the family in the same way and was, like Wilsford, held for the service of finding one wax taper for the church of Salisbury.³³⁵

Other lands did come into the family's possession in Roesia's time. A charter of John de Verdun's reveals that Michael Belet had granted Roesia a number of houses in Shoe Lane in London, although when and why is completely unknown.³³⁶ Perhaps it was due to his relationship with Walter de Verdun,

³³⁰ Stafford, Record Office, Sutherland Collection, D593/A/2/23/2 and D593/A/2/23/3.

³³¹ *WS*, 6/1, p. 223; *Rot. Hundredorum*, 1, p. 59.

³³² *CLR*, 1245-51, p. 111.

³³³ *CIPM*, 2, no. 78.

³³⁴ *CRR*, 17, no. 1462.

³³⁵ *CIPM*, 2, no. 6.

³³⁶ *Duchy of Lancaster Cartae Miscellaneae*, PRO Lists and Indexes, supplementary series, 5/3 (repr. New York, 1964), no. 224.

Roesia's cousin.³³⁷ Just as obscure is the way in which Bruntingthorp in Leicestershire had come into Roesia's hands by the time of the survey of 1242-3 - assuming that she was the first de Verdun to hold the manor. There is, however, some evidence to explain how it was that Ibstock, also in Leicestershire, found its way into Roesia's possession. Robert de Verdun, one of Bertram III's sons and so Roesia's uncle, had married one of Henry of Burton's two daughters at an uncertain date and acquired Ibstock through this marriage.³³⁸ On his death, presumably without heir, the manor came to Roesia as Robert's nearest kin, she being the descendant of his elder brother.³³⁹

As a woman, Roesia's scope of operations was more limited than that of her male counterparts or relatives. She could not attend the king's council or parliament, nor could she join military campaigns or act as a member of a jury.³⁴⁰ However, as a tenant-in-chief she did have obligations to provide the military and other services by which she held her lands from the king. She was clearly called on to provide such service in 1234 during Henry III's campaign against Richard Marshal. Marshal appears to have been brought to rebellion against Henry III as a result of his need to assert his leadership over his family's affinity - a need which was the result of the fact that before his succession to his family's British estates Richard's career had been centred in France, so that he was consequently unknown to most of his British tenants.³⁴¹ Henry III took Richard's castle at Usk in September 1233 after a three day siege and a truce followed. War, however, was resumed on 17 October on the news that Marshal, now allied with Llywelyn Fawr, had ejected the king's garrison from Usk. The court's baggage was subsequently attacked during Henry III's stay at Grosmont and a number of castles including Monmouth, Abergavenny, Cardiff and Carmarthen were taken or besieged by Richard and his Welsh allies.³⁴² Roesia's contribution to Henry's effort against Marshal was to fine ten marks "that she be quit of sending knights to the army of the king in Wales."³⁴³

In 1234, this was not an unusual course of action to take. Powicke stated that the king was able "to check a widespread movement among the barons, but he could

³³⁷ Michael Belet was Walter's brother-in-law. (N. Vincent, *Peter des Roches*, p. 214, n. 172.)

³³⁸ *Leicestershire*, 4/2, p. 749.

³³⁹ J. G. H. Hudson, *Land, Law and Lordship in Anglo-Norman England* (Oxford, 1994), p. 108.

³⁴⁰ L. E. Mitchell, 'Noble Widowhood in the Thirteenth Century: Three Generations of Mortimer Widows, 1246-1334', *Upon my Husband's Death*, ed. L. Mirrer (Michigan, 1992), p. 170.

³⁴¹ N. Vincent, *Peter des Roches*, pp. 396-7.

³⁴² *ibid*, pp. 412, 418-19.

³⁴³ PRO, E372/78, memb. 1v.; BL, Additional MS 18446, p. 5.

not stir them to effective action in his cause... Opinion was against him."³⁴⁴ This is well illustrated in the pipe roll of 1234 which contains a large number of fines by which individuals, and especially churchmen, quitted themselves of sending knights to aid the king. For example, the bishop of Coventry fined 25 marks to be so quit. The bishop of Lincoln fined £110 and Henry Chamberleng five marks in the account for Lincolnshire, while in Norfolk and Suffolk the abbot of St Benedict of Holme fined 10 marks. In Kent, St Augustine's abbey in Canterbury fined sixty marks to be "quit of the service owed to the king in the army summoned to Ireland" (which was diverted to fight against Marshal) as did another fourteen Kentish laymen, amongst whom were Rannulf de Bosehaul (who fined 40s.), John de Valeynes, (40s.), Thomas de Camvill (£10) and Roger de Andinton (60s.).³⁴⁵

In Ireland, "for several years after Richard Marshal's death colonial society and Anglo-Irish relations were marked by a measure of harmony that had rarely if ever been known before."³⁴⁶ It was in this period of calm that Roesia de Verdun lived and worked. If she fails to appear on the broad stage of colonial politics, such as the conquest of Connacht, on account of her gender, her operations in the de Verdun lordship of Dundalk are more clearly seen. Roesia was concerned to recover lost lands and rights, as well as to increase the lands under her control. To this end in the first years of her rule Roesia finally brought to a conclusion the dispute with Hugh de Lacy which had loomed so large in her father's Irish career.

Roesia's agreement with Hugh of c.1235 was probably primarily intended to bring stability to relations between the two families, although in the event it set the recovery of the de Verduns' lands in county Louth on a permanent footing. In the *conventio*, Hugh "quit-claims for his life all right which he had in that half of the land which he demanded from [Roesia] in right of the agreement formerly made between the earl and Thomas de Verdun, saving the right of his heirs after his death if they could acquire any out of the former agreement. So that the said Roesia de Verdun and her heirs may hold all that moiety of land which the earl demanded from her, for the life of the earl. And if his heirs, while he live, wish to reclaim against Roesia, or move any suit upon the said land, by the said agreement, the earl will annul it."³⁴⁷ In return, Roesia gave the earl £200 to be paid within two years, with excommunication being threatened on either party who broke the

³⁴⁴ F. M. Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century, 1215-1307*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1962), p. 55.

³⁴⁵ PRO, E372/78, membs. 1v., 4v., 6, 6v., 7v.

³⁴⁶ R. Frame, *Colonial Ireland, 1169-1369* (Dublin, 1981), p. 62.

³⁴⁷ *Gormanston Reg.*, pp. 161-2.

agreement - a clause possibly indicative of residual distrust between de Verdun and de Lacy. In the event Roesia's settlement proved final. Despite later attempts by Matilda, Hugh's daughter, to recover these lands,³⁴⁸ the de Verduns retained them undivided until the extinction of the male line in 1316.

At about the same time as she was recovering that part of Dundalk held by de Lacy, Roesia was consolidating the north-western frontier of her lordship. The close rolls reveal that by July 1236, Roesia de Verdun had "built a good castle strongly in her land against the Irish."³⁴⁹ This castle has been identified as that at Castleroché and the note of its construction goes on to state that this was something "which none of her predecessors was able to do," unusual words which probably owe their origin to Roesia's own report of proceedings and suggest a determination to prove herself at least the equal of her forbears. It should be noted, however, that the phrase *castellum firmavit*, at least in the twelfth century, is ambiguous.³⁵⁰ It is not, therefore, altogether clear whether this note refers to the construction of a completely new castle on a completely new site, or simply to the fortification in stone of an already existing stronghold. Whatever the case, Roesia was not content with the (re)fortification of this one castle, for in the same entry the king writes that she intended "to build another castle to the great security of our land" to fund which she was granted the service of Meath and Uriel. The location of this second castle is unknown. Otway-Ruthven favoured its identification with the motte-and-bailey at Mount Bagnall on the Cooley peninsula³⁵¹ but it is possible that Roesia simply intended to rebuild her grandfather's castle at Dundalk.

Castleroché remains the best preserved of all the de Verduns' castles - they came to have at least eleven in total³⁵² - and stands on the rock from which it takes its name overlooking the roads into Dundalk from Armagh and Monaghan (via Castleblayney). There is rather a nice, albeit apocryphal, local tradition about the construction of this castle which might provide some insight into Roesia's

³⁴⁸ *ibid*, p. 144.

³⁴⁹ *CCR*, 1234-7, p. 364; *CDI*, 1, no. 2334.

³⁵⁰ For example, Roger of Howden in his *Gesta Henrici Secundi* states that Roger de Mowbray *firmavit* a castle at Kinnardferry in Axholme, while Ralph of Diceto reveals that he simply rebuilt it. (F. M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism, 1066-1166*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1961), pp. 202-3.)

³⁵¹ A. J. Otway-Ruthven, 'The Partition of the de Verdon Lands', *PRLA*, 66, section C (1968), p. 407.

³⁵² Alton, Brandon and Weobley in England, Ewias Lacy in the Welsh march, Dundalk, Castleroché, Duleek, Lough Sewdy, Incheleffer, Moydow and Athleague in Ireland.



1.8. Castleroché.

character. It is said that when Roesia was first having the castle designed she promised the architect that if she liked the finished article then she would marry him. The architect, duly inspired to become master of lands in Louth and England, exerted himself to do the best job he could and, indeed, Roesia was very pleased with the finished result. However, as she stood admiring the view from the large windows of her new great hall and the architect arrived to remind her of her promise, Roesia decided that marriage was not an option afterall and had the gentleman launched out of the hall window to fall to his death at the foot of the castle crag.³⁵³

Castleroch, which is built from roughly coursed limestone ashlar and greywacke, takes the form of a nearly triangular enclosure. The curtain walls follow the contours of the rock on which the castle stands and rise directly from it. Regularly spaced openings around the top of the wall suggest that a hoarding could have been fitted to provide some extra wall-top defence. All the main surviving buildings are grouped along the east wall. At the south, where the ground falls most steeply away, is the hall with its three large south-facing windows and a basement below which has a blocked sallyport in the east wall. Adjoining this is the gatehouse, where twin flattened 'D'-shaped towers, battered up to about three metres high, flank the gate passage. This was approached via a drawbridge which spanned the shallow rock-cut fosse which runs along the whole of the eastern side of the castle and separates it from the rest of a small plateau, upon which the borough of Castleroch probably stood. At the north-eastern angle stand the remains of a four storied 'D'-shaped tower, of which only the basement survives. Within the enclosure itself, which is now regularly used as a rather grand sheep-fold, stands a small square building. Its function and date are unknown.

The *Archaeological Survey of County Louth* suggests that the remains of the castle belong to a date later than Roesia's career so that it was "probably built by [Roesia's] son John, who died in 1274."³⁵⁴ No argument is put forwards in defence of this statement and an examination of the surviving structures, and especially the gatehouse, do nothing to support it. The gatehouse at Castleroch is relatively undeveloped, not at all like those built in the 1260's and 1270's at, for example, Caerphilly, Tonbridge and the de Verduns' own castle at Alton. Twin-towered

³⁵³ P. Harbison, *Guide to National and Historic Monuments of Ireland* (Dublin, 1992), p. 233.

³⁵⁴ V. M. Buckley and P. D. Sweetman, *Archaeological Survey of County Louth*, no. 1120, p. 333.

gatehouses were not new even in Roesia's day. Limerick and Dublin castles both sport early versions of such gatehouses,³⁵⁵ as does Montgomery castle in Powys which was built in 1223-31. The towers of all these structures, however, are more rounded and project further from the curtain walls than do those at Castleroché. A better comparison is provided by the gatehouse at Beeston castle in Cheshire, built by Rannulf III of Chester in c.1225 and known in contemporary documents as the 'castellum de Rupe' - as was Castleroché. Indeed, the similarities between Castleroché and Beeston in name and form may not be simply coincidence. The construction of these castles on their rocks of course owes a great deal to local topography. However, it is likely that Roesia de Verdun passed Beeston on her way from Staffordshire to Chester, where she would have crossed to her Irish estates, or that she attended Rannulf's court there as part of her tenorial obligations. The design of Castleroché, therefore, might well have been influenced by that of the castle at Beeston. It might in that respect have even been intended to act as a vehicle for propaganda, suggesting, perhaps, that the de Verduns' power in Louth was as great as that of the earl of Chester in Cheshire.

The construction of these castles might relate to an order previously given to Nicholas de Verdun to fortify his lands in 1229, from which he had been respited due to his serving with the king.³⁵⁶ This is suggested by Roesia's being granted the service of Meath and Uriel for the construction of the proposed castle near the sea, as Nicholas had been offered the same financial assistance. The construction of Castleroché did not greatly increase the lands under de Verdun control, however. It stands only a mile or two west of Kane, an area probably conquered by Nicholas de Verdun and Hugh de Lacy before 1211. It may be the case that the conflict between Hugh and Nicholas was responsible for de Verdun's failure to fortify his land. Stability was required to build a masonry castle as the attempts to build at Roscommon and Caerphilly in the 1260's and 1270's demonstrate.³⁵⁷ It may be the case, therefore, that Roesia's successful construction of Castleroché was assisted by the end of the fighting between these Anglo-Norman families, as well as by

³⁵⁵ Limerick castle has been dated to the beginning of the thirteenth century. The construction of Dublin castle was ordered in 1205 but it was only finished in about 1248. (T. B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*, p. 65 for Limerick and p. 64 for Dublin; D. Sweetman, 'Anglo-Norman Fortresses,' *The Illustrated Archaeology of Ireland*, ed. M. Ryan (Dublin, 1991), p. 186 for Dublin.)

³⁵⁶ *CDI*, 1, no. 1690.

³⁵⁷ For Roscommon see A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval Ireland*, pp. 199-202; T. B. Barry, *The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland*, pp. 66-7. For Caerphilly see R. R. Davies, *The Age of Conquest: Wales, 1063-1415* (Oxford, 1991), p. 322; D. Walker, *Medieval Wales* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 122.

events in native Irish politics in Uriel at that time. Aedh Meith O'Neill had provided strong Irish leadership in the area, never fully submitting to the royal administration and even joining with Hugh de Lacy in 1224. However, on his death in the early 1230's he left a young son, Domhnall O'Neill, and this resulted in a challenge for the kingship by Domhnall Mac Lochlainn, who killed O'Neill in 1234-5. Katharine Simms believes that "this disunity amongst the Irish... made it possible for Roesia de Verdun to fortify Castleroché on the Louth-Armagh border," as well as for the lord deputy to establish a castle at Armagh in 1236,³⁵⁸ just as native weakness in Connacht in the 1280's allowed further westwards expansion by the Anglo-Normans in that region.

The political situation in Uriel raises questions about the possible expansion of Roesia's lordship at this time. In 1242, Roesia enlarged her territory southwards through the leasing of the king's manor of Louth,³⁵⁹ but if the justiciar could build a castle at or near Armagh city it is also possible that Roesia had managed to expand her lordship into the present county Armagh, the area having being a target for de Verdun ambitions since 1217. This could explain a record dating to 1243 in which Roesia was respited "regarding the settling of her land."³⁶⁰ Alternatively, this record could relate simply to the lordship of Dundalk.

It is certainly not difficult to see how Dundalk could have failed to attract settlers - or could have been depopulated - in the previous two or three decades. Security was vital for effective colonisation and it was something that the lordship of Dundalk was short of. In 1228-9, for example, Stephen of Lexington asked that the lands of Mellifont abbey be transferred out of Uriel as, "though there may be peace by the hour, there is no constant peace, no secure peace."³⁶¹ He may not have simply been referring to attacks by the native Irish, for at the time he was writing relations between Nicholas de Verdun and Hugh de Lacy were still somewhat unsettled. The ravaging that de Lacy had carried out in Dundalk could not have made the area seem attractive to English settlers and could easily have led to the departure of any existing tenants. Nor were the de Verduns able to offer one of the more usual inducements to settlement of the frontier. Magnates like Hugh I

³⁵⁸ K. Simms, 'O'Hanlons, O'Neills and the Anglo-Normans in Thirteenth-Century Armagh', *Seanchas Ard Macha*, 9/1 (1978), pp. 77-8.

³⁵⁹ *CDI*, 1, no. 2544.

³⁶⁰ *CDI*, 1, no. 2567.

³⁶¹ B. Smith, 'The Concept of the March in Medieval Ireland: The Case of Uriel', *PRIA*, 88, section C (1988), p. 259.

de Lacy promoted settlement in frontier areas, such as Ferrard or Westmeath, by making the knights' fees in these areas larger than those in more secure regions - in this case thirty ploughlands to a fee instead of twenty. However, the de Verdun lordship in Ireland was not large enough to be parcelled into fees of this size. Indeed, if Thomas de Verdun's *conventio* of c.1195 could mention five knight's fees around the castle of Dundalk, and Henry of Wootton and Adam of Audley could hold a fee each in Kane, the size of the fees of the lordship must have been small, so reducing the attraction of settling in the area. Nor were the de Verduns necessarily able to coax lesser tenants from their English estates to become their tenants in Ireland too. For example, in 1284 the sheriff of Staffordshire stated that Thomas Wade "draws his origin in Alton in [that] county"³⁶² - the caput of the de Verduns' English estates - but was a burgess of Carlow.

Assuming the respite over settlement to have concerned Dundalk rather than any possible conquests in Armagh, Roesia seems to have taken steps to resolve at least some of the problems preventing the arrival of sufficient numbers of colonists. She reached agreement with Hugh de Lacy in c.1235 and built castles in and around 1236, so improving the security of the area which was also benefiting from the disunity amongst the Irish.³⁶³ Furthermore, Roesia founded or developed the Newtown of Dundalk, presumably in an effort to develop the commercial life of the lordship and to provide a magnet for colonists attracted by the prospect of burgage tenure, self government and freedom. Castletown Dundalk, the original borough founded by 1190, although it commanded the ford over the river, was inaccessible to shipping even in the twelfth century. The decision to establish the Newtown further downstream, therefore, "must have been related to a desire to develop a viable port to take advantage of the growing trade across and along the Irish Sea."³⁶⁴ It is possible that the grants of fairs and markets given to Nicholas de Verdun in 1226 and 1230 mark the establishment of the Newtown, but there is no other hint of its existence until Roesia's foundation of the friary at Seatown in 1246. Whether her attempts to develop the commercial life of her lordship were successful in attracting settlers, or whether the more peaceful conditions prevailing in the lordship from the later 1230's on were enough in themselves, the problems in

³⁶² *CDI*, 2, no. 2183.

³⁶³ It is possible that the castles at Faughart, Raskeagh and Barronstown were built at around this time too as they, along with Castleroch, form a defensive arc around Dundalk. If these castles were built by Roesia's tenants at her suggestion, they would be evidence of a high degree of central planning not otherwise apparent. The south-western border of the lordship of Dundalk was, of course, protected by the castles of the barony of Louth such as Castlering.

³⁶⁴ P. Gosling, *From Dun Delca to Dundalk*, p. 263.



1.9. The effigy of Roesia de Verdun in Belton church.

attracting colonists appear to have been overcome as nothing more is heard of any need to settle the lordship of Dundalk.

Roesia de Verdun's career was, then, a successful one. She founded two religious houses, developed the Newtown of Dundalk, expanded and consolidated her lordships, settled thirty years of irregular relations with Hugh de Lacy and constructed two new castles as both a defence for her Irish lands and as a manifestation of family power. Roesia's career thus gives emphatic support to Ward's statement that "looking at the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, it appears that noblewomen's lands were as well run as in the time of their husbands or fathers."³⁶⁵ Indeed, Roesia's career also provides an example of the unsurprising fact that widows "had to perform the usual responsibilities inherent in medieval land ownership: doing business with their tenants, protecting them from outside encroachment, punishing them for not paying their rents, acting as guardians of their children and executors of their wills."³⁶⁶ Nor was Roesia unusual in not remarrying. Only seventeen of the forty-eight aristocratic widows who occur between 1225 and 1307 remarried, with 41% of each group being heiresses.³⁶⁷

Where Roesia's career is unusual, however, is in her construction of castles. Medieval noblewomen did undertake building works. Elizabeth de Burgh, for example, built a new chamber at Clare in 1346-7 and a London house in 1352.³⁶⁸ Women can also be found holding castles. Christina de Marisco surrendered all her castles and fortifications in Ireland to Edward I and his queen in 1280,³⁶⁹ while Margaret, the widow of Edmund Mortimer, demanded the custody of one of the three Mortimer castles as part of her dower and was assigned Radnor.³⁷⁰ The construction of a new castle by an heiress or widow in a frontier region, such as Roesia de Verdun's Castleroch, however, seems most unusual.

³⁶⁵ J. Ward, *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1992), p. 115.

³⁶⁶ L. E. Mitchell, 'The Lady is a Lord: Noble Widows and Land in Thirteenth Century Britain', *Historical Reflections* 18 (1992), p. 87.

³⁶⁷ *ibid*, p. 86

³⁶⁸ J. Ward, *English Noblewomen*, p. 84.

³⁶⁹ *CDI*, 2, no. 1771.

³⁷⁰ L. E. Mitchell, 'Noble Widowhood in the Thirteenth Century', *Upon my Husband's Death*, ed. L. Mirrer, pp. 178.