ROESIA DE VERDUN, 13TH CENTURY *FEMME SOLE*

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the life and legacy of Roesia de Verdun (c. 1204 – 1247), an Anglo-Norman noblewoman whose strategic marriages, assertive widowhood, and material patronage illuminate the complex roles available to medieval women navigating power and identity. Divided into three parts, the study begins with Roesia's dynastic positioning through marriage and motherhood, highlighting how her unions reflected contemporary norms and secured the de Verdun lineage. Next, it advocates her second widowhood as a turning point when she operated as a *femme sole,* a legally independent woman. During this period, she resisted remarriage, managed estates, and emerged as a legal and political actor, appearing in court records and corresponding with influential figures like Bishop Robert Grosseteste. Finally, the third part turns to her material legacy, analyzing personalized artefacts such as her seals and tomb effigy alongside her architectural and religious foundations. These objects reveal how Roesia curated her public image and asserted agency through symbolic representation. By tracing her influence across familial, legal, and commemorative domains, this study contributes to broader conversations about medieval women's autonomy, dynastic strategy, and the interplay between gender and material culture.

Introduction

One of the most often repeated legends of Roesia de Verdun is not as the dynastic heiress, religious patron, castle-builder, and *femme sole* she was, but instead as a cunning seductress grounded in gendered tropes of female manipulation. I was first introduced to Roesia during a visit to Castleroche in County Louth, Ireland in 2012. I was told that the castle was built by a wealthy medieval widow who offered to marry whoever built it for her. The story continues that she pushed her unsuspecting suitor out of a window following completion of the castle and therefore retained her independence and a guarantee no one would have a castle like hers. This tale, which has no contemporary evidence supporting it, has plagued Roesia through the centuries and undermines her independence and authority. It continues to be referenced in modern publications about her as recently as 2019.[1] Despite her accomplishments, which received accolades from an English king who praised her success, she has been defined by this reductive narrative for too long and her legacy merits broader analysis. This thesis offers a comprehensive biographical study of Roesia de Verdun, illuminating her life, achievements, and legacy as a *femme sole* beyond the infamous defenestration accusation.

An extensive dissertation on the de Verdun family was undertaken by Hagger in 1998 for his doctoral thesis. Hagger's work traces the lineage of the main de Verdun line, focusing on the land holdings of the family in England, Ireland, and Wales and the impact that property ownership had on their fortunes.[2] Roesia de Verdun is discussed mostly with respect to her contributions of land through inheritance and marriage, as well as her role in the progression of the de Verdun line, and was the only female head of the main branch of the family. A closer look at her life and actions shows how her importance extends beyond being solely a conduit for the de Verdun name. Not only did she safeguard the family's fortunes for decades, but she also independently constructed fortifications in Ireland, stimulated local commerce, founded religious institutions, and actively defended her holdings in court.

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[1] Margaret Roddy 'Book Celebrates Woman Who Built Roche Castle', *Irish Independent*, 25 October 2019. Available at: https://www.independent.ie/regionals/louth/dundalk-news/book-celebrates-woman-who-built-roche-castle/38616222.html (Accessed 31 December 2023).

[2] Mark Hagger, *The de Verdun Family in England, Ireland and Wales, 1066-1316: A Study.* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of St Andrews, 1998).

By examining previously overlooked facets of her life, this study contributes to the growing field of medieval women's history.[3] Special attention will be paid to her years as a *femme sole*, during which her autonomy was most visibly exercised. Although the de Verdun line male line ended in 1316, Roesia's material legacy endures, standing as a testament to her influence nearly eight centuries later. A family tree of the main de Verdun line from their arrival into England through to the final male heir is shown to demonstrate Roesia's placement in context of the greater familial legacy (see Figure 1).[4]

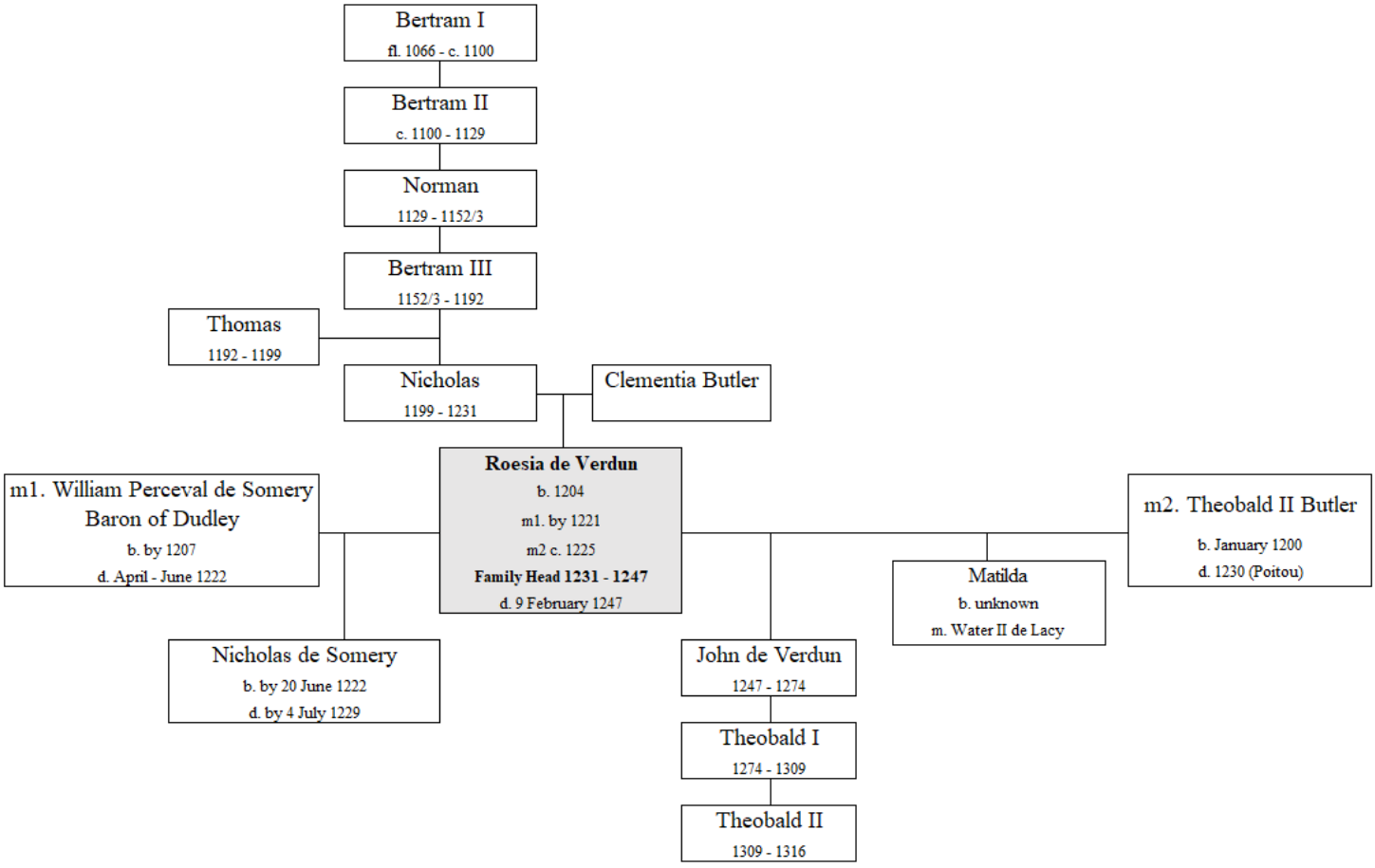

Figure 1: de Verdun Family Tree and Tenures as Head of the Main Line

[3] For example, see works such as J. Adams and N. Bradbury, *Medieval Women and Their Objects*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017). V. Blud, D. Heath, and E. Klafter, eds., *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces, and Thresholds,* (London: University of London Press, 2019). J. Jasperse, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power: Matilda Plantagenet and her Sisters*, (Yorkshire: Arc Humanities Press, 2020).
[4] Dates for Figure 1 come from Hagger, *The de Verdun Family* as well as sources named within the body of this text.

Part 1: Roesia de Verdun and the Politics of Marriage

Foundations of the de Verdun Lineage

The de Verdun family, with origins in Normandy, participated in the 1066 conquest of England, as evidenced by Bertram I de Verdun's inclusion in the Domesday Book (1086) as a landholder in Buckinghamshire. Successive generations, notably Bertram II and his son Norman, expanded their holdings through loyal service to the crown and strategic marriages. Notably, Norman de Verdun's marriage to Lecelina de Clinton, daughter to the chamberlain of Henry I, by 1135 brought with it significant lands in Warwickshire and Oxfordshire, further establishing the family's territorial reach.[5]

Norman's son Bertram III brought further prominence to the family through appointments as sheriff, itinerant justice, and Crusader following his assumption at the head of the family in 1152. His later elevation in Ireland, including seneschalship under Prince John and the founding of institutions in Dundalk, underscored the family's rising influence.[6] The lands conferred upon Bertram III by Prince John subsequently became central to Roesia's protracted negotiations and efforts to assert and defend familial claims over inheritance and control which will be analyzed in this thesis. Bertram III was also the first member of the de Verdun family to found a religious house, an act his granddaughter Roesia would repeat. His foundation of Croxden Abbey in 1176 and construction of Alton Castle, establishing the family caput in England, reflected a consolidation of wealth and piety and set precedents that subsequent members of the de Verdun family would continue.[7]

Bertram III accompanied Richard I on the Third Crusade and was named co-governor of the city of Acre when it was captured in 1191. It was there that Bertram III died and was buried the following year.[8] Such an end could only have increased the reputation of the de Verdun family for having died on such a significant expedition with the king and it certainly did not

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[5] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, pp 1-5, 12-14.
[6] Bertram III established a mott and bailey castle in Dundalk, Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, pp. 23–27, 37–40 and was said to have founded a hospital there as well, dedicated to St. John and St Leonard, see Arthur Curran, 'The Priory of St. Leonard, Dundalk', *The Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society,* 17(3) (1971), 131-140 (p. 131).
[7] 'Houses of Cistercian Monks: The Abbey of Croxden', in *A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 3*, ed. by M.W. Greenslade and R. B. Pugh (London: Victoria County History, 1970), pp. 226–230.
[8] Richard Dace, 'Bertram de Verdun: Royal Service, Land, and Family in the Late Twelfth Century', *Medieval Prosopography*, 20 (1999), pp. 75–93, (p. 84).

seem to hurt the family's prospects. Upon Bertram III's death, his son Thomas succeeded briefly, arranging the marriage of his sister Leselina to Hugh de Lacy the Younger between 1194 and 1199, and transferring portions of Dundalk to de Lacy as her marriage portion.[9] Hugh the Younger was soon after granted Lordship of Ulster, which, combined with his inherited lands and Leselina's contribution, reflected a jurisdiction over more than a third of the English territory in Ireland.[10] This alliance intertwined the de Verduns with one of Ireland's most powerful families, though the transfer of Dundalk would later be challenged by Roesia.

Thomas' tenure at the head of the family was short-lived, and he died without issue in 1199, leaving his younger brother Nicholas to inherit the family estates. Nicholas continued the family's support for the crown, supporting King John abroad on campaigns in France and later in Ireland securing land in Armagh and fighting his brother-in-law Hugh de Lacy, who had turned against the crown.[11] It was in this period that Nicholas' daughter Roesia was born in England around 1204.[12]

Nicholas continued to support the crown after King John died and royal trust in the family was further demonstrated in 1228, when King Henry III placed Susanna, his half-niece and daughter of Llewelyn ap Iorwerth, ruler of northern Wales, in the custody of Nicholas and his wife Clementia.[13] Such an important hostage would not have been sent to live with a family that the crown did not feel they could implicitly trust with the responsibility.

Nicholas appeared in the Close Rolls in May 1231 on account of a dispute in Ireland, which was his last recorded act.[14] Nicholas's death was not specifically recorded, but on 2 October 1231, the Fine Rolls of Henry III capture an order to the sheriff of Warwickshire and Leicestershire to seize the lands and tenements of Nicholas de Verdun, who had died.[15] Soon

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[9] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 45.
[10] Nicholas J. Synnott, 'Notes on the Family of De Lacy in Ireland', *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* 9(2) (1919), 113–131 (p.115).
[11] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, pp. 49-55
[12] Gillian Kenny, 'Roesia de Verdon [Verdun]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2021, https://doi.org/10.1093/odnb/9780198614128.013.90000369548 [Accessed 24 March 2022].
[13] Llewelyn married Henry III's half-sister Joan, an illegitimate daughter of King John, and mother of Susanna. It is believed Susanna was sent to the de Verduns as a hostage to ensure Llewelyn's cooperation with Henry III following conflict in the Marches. Kathryn Hurlock, 'The Welsh Wife of Malcolm, Earl of Fife (d. 1266): An Alternative Suggestion', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 82(2) (2009), 352–355 (p. 354).
[14] *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in the Public Record Office, A.D. 1227–1231,* ed. by H.C. Maxwell Lyte, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1902), p. 505.
[15] London, The National Archives and King's College London, *Henry III Fine Rolls Project*, 2009, https://finerollshenry3.org.uk/content/calendar/calendar.html [Accessed 20 January 2025], C 60/30, Membrane 1.

after, on 24 October 1231, his widow Clementia petitioned for ownership of the lands from her husband.[16] There is evidence suggesting that Nicholas had a son named Bertram, as he granted an early charter to "Bertram de Verdun his son".[17] However, by the time of Nicholas' death in 1231, Roesia received all the de Verdun lands, which would have meant any brother(s) she had predeceased their father.

Rohesia de Verdun

There is no indication that Roesia's early life deviated from expectations for a high-status girl in medieval England. She was born around 1204 and likely named after her grandmother, the wife of Bertram III.[18] Although her parent's marriage is unrecorded, a 1243 plea from Roesia confirms Clementia Butler was her mother, as Roesia claimed rights to Stoke Farthing as the heir of Philip Butler, the father of Clementia de Verdun.[19]

As this section will explore in greater detail, Roesia entered into two marriages, both unions reflecting contemporary norms and dynastic strategy focused on land and inheritance. She had children with both spouses, so it was fortunate that her second husband had also previously been married, as he had an heir from his first wife. This existing lineage enabled his son with Roesia to inherit the de Verdun name, this securing continuity of the family line.

Roesia's public life becomes more visible following her second widowhood, when she actively resisted remarriage and focused on securing her estates. She appears frequently in legal records, both as petitioner and defendant, and corresponded with influential figures such as Bishop Robert Grosseteste. Her building initiatives included at least one castle and the foundation of two religious institutions.

Her death was recorded in the Annals of Croxden as "four days before the Ides of February, 1247", which places her death on the 9th of February of that year.[20] She was buried at Grace Dieu Priory, which she founded in Leicestershire, but later relocated to the parish church

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[16] *Close Rolls A.D. 1227–1231,* p. 572.
[17] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 240.
[18] Variations in spelling include Rohesia, Rose, and Roheis. An unpublished manuscript by a descendent of the de Verdun family claims that Roesia also had a great aunt named Rohese, so the name was not uncommon for the de Verdun family. See Margaret R. G. Shepherd, *The Illustrious de Verduns Part I: The de Verduns from 992-1275* (Unpublished family history, University of Victoria, 1987-1989), p. 37.
[19] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 66.
[20] W.H. Grattan Flood, 'The de Verdons of Louth', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 9(4) (1899), 417-419 (pp. 417-418).

at Belton, where her tomb fell into disrepair before being restored in the early twentieth century. Despite a relatively brief life, Roesia's legacy as an autonomous and influential figure endures and will be explored in greater depth for the remainder of this work. The absence of a recorded birth, though born to a noble family, reflects the limited expectations placed upon her as a daughter beyond the norms of marrying and producing heirs. However, contrary to these norms, she emerged as a pivotal figure in the de Verdun dynasty, exerting substantial influence over its continued prosperity and securing a legacy that warrants recognition. A full chronology of the life of Roesia de Verdun is available in the Appendix, Table 1.

Roesia's 1st Husband: William Perceval de Somery

As is often the case with medieval women, records of Roesia de Verdun's life prior to marriage are scarce, so her biography begins with her first union. While no primary document names her initial husband, circumstantial evidence supports William Perceval de Somery as the most probably candidate. The de Somerys, like the de Verduns, were a Norman family with close ties to the crown and held the barony of Dudley near the de Verdun estates.[21] These facts establish that the de Somery and de Verdun families would have been geographically close to one another as well as moving within the same social circles of elite Norman families. Marriage between Norman families ensured a certain degree of legal and cultural affinity and harmony as both families would be familiar with the language and customs of the other. Families with a stronger bond would be more likely to provide mutual protection through the alliance, as well as the benefit of territorial cohesion between their landholdings. Given that there had been ongoing efforts by the de Verdun family prior to this union to actively pursue marriages that would expand their landholdings, and the de Somery family would have been similarly landlocked, it would have been mutually beneficial to consolidate land through the marriage of Roesia and William. William's father, Ralph de Somery, served King John abroad, as did Roesia's father, and he successfully petitioned for royal manors but died in 1210 when William was still a minor.[22]

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[21] Alternatives spellings include Somere, Somerie, Someri and Sumery. The barony was inherited through descendants from the Fitz-Ansculph and Paganel families. Henry Sydney Grazebook, 'Part II: An Account of the Barons of Dudley' in *William Salt Archaeological Society Collections for a History of Staffordshire, Vol. 9*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1888), pp 1-152, (pp. 7-12).

[22] Ralph de Somery amassed a large amount of land in his lifetime, petitioning King John for the royal manors of Mere, Clent, and Swinford, as well as the Paganel family lands held by his mother. Grazebook, 'Barons of Dudley', pp. 13–14.

By 1221, William Perceval de Somery had reached majority and served in the royal army, and was thus likely born between 1196 and 1207, approximately the same time as Roesia.[23] Medieval marriages among the nobility were arranged for socio-economic gain, but in order to ensure a productive lineage and maintain family titles and estates, it would have been advantageous for spouses to be reasonably close in age, providing ample childbearing years to achieve this goal. It would have seemed that both William and Roesia had full and productive lives ahead of them at their union.

Few records captured William's life, or when he and Roesia married, but his death is given as 1222 and it was noted that he had one son and heir, Nicholas de Somery. On 27 January 1223, Henry III sends a letter to Nicholas de Verdun and his daughter Roesia to remit the son and heir of William Percevel de Somery to the Earl of Chester in anticipation of marriage to the Earl's daughter in the future:

> Rex Nich[olas] de Verdun [e]t Roes[ia] filie sue sal[u]t[em]. Mandam[us] vob[is] q[uo]d sine dil[ati]one faciatis h[abe]re R. Com[itis] Cestr[ie] [e]t Linc[olnshire] filiu[s] hered[e] Willi[am] Perceval de Sum[er]y cuj[us] custodia [e]t maritagiu[m] eide[m] Comiti co[n]cessim[us].[24]

The fact that this order was sent not only to Nicholas de Verdun but also to Roesia is critical in establishing Roesia as the boy's mother, as there would not have otherwise been a reason to include Roesia on the order. It is a reasonable assumption that Nicholas de Verdun had custody of Nicholas de Somery because the boy was his grandson and was living with his grandparents upon the death of his father earlier in the year. It would not have been unusual for Nicholas to be in the wardship of his grandfather. Often, fatherless children were sent to live with to the nearest male relative of their mother, even if their mother were still alive.[25]

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[23] Grazebook, 'Barons of Dudley', p. 14. The age of maturity was fourteen for medieval boys, twelve for girls, and it was at this age that the church allowed them to marry. From this information and the dates given for William to be a minor and then mature, an approximate date of birth can be derived. R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 98.

[24] Translated as: "King Nicholas de Verdun and his daughter Roesia send greetings. We command you, without delay, to cause the Earl of Chester and Lincolnshire to have the son and heir of William Percevel de Somery, whose wardship and marriage we have granted to the said Earl." *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati, Vol.1: 1204–1224,* ed. by Thomas Duffy Hardy (London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1833), p. 531. The author gratefully acknowledges the transcription and translation assistance of Dr. Katie Hawks.

[25] Gillian Kenny, *Anglo-Irish and Gaelic Women in Ireland, c. 1170–1540*, (Cornwall: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp. 23–24.

In researching the de Somery family, the names Ralph, Roger, and John are frequently used for male heirs, while Nicholas seldom appears. In fact, the next Nicholas de Somery does not appear in a family pedigree until the reign of Edward II a century later.[26] Thus, William Perceval de Somery's son was likely not named for a member of his family but instead for his wife's family. This suggests the significance Roesia placed on dynastic identity. While there is no evidence that Roesia and William had any other children, it may have been that an elder son, named in a more traditional de Somery manner such as Roger or Ralph had been born, paving the way for a second son to be named Nicholas. If such a first son existed, he predeceased William, leaving the de Somery inheritance to Nicholas.

When Henry III placed Nicholas de Somery with the Earl of Chester, he noted that the boy was to be married to one of Ranulf's daughters and control of the de Somery land was to be held by Ranulf in the meantime.[27] Six years later in 1228, Nicholas de Somery was still a ward of the earl, so the boy must have been very young when his father died in 1222.[28] The earl waited for the boy to reach maturity to complete the marriage compact, but it was not to be. On 4 July 1229, local sheriffs were ordered to seize the land of Nicholas de Somery, who had died seised, and a few days later they were granted to the boy's uncle, Roger de Somery, as the heir.[29] The fact that William and his only heir Nicholas both died in short succession, and the Barony of Dudley continued through Roger, would explain why so little is documented regarding Roesia's first husband. No records have been found which captured Roesia's reaction, but to have her young son die while in the wardship of another family would undoubtedly have been difficult for her. In addition, at the time of her young son's death, she had remarried, as will be discussed in the following section.

A final link between the de Somery and de Verdun families appears in 1244, when Roesia sued Roger over land within the Barony of Dudley, asserting a prior convention he had with her.[30] Though unresolved in the records, the suit exemplifies Roesia's legal acumen and her

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[26] Grazebook, 'Barons of Dudley', facing p. 1.
[27] *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum Vol I: 1204–1224*, p. 500.
[28] Grazebook, 'Barons of Dudley', p. 16.
[29] Notification of Nicholas' death in *Calendar of the Fine Rolls of the Reign of Henry III (1216–1248) Vol II: 1224–1234*, ed. Paul Dryburgh and Beth Hartland, (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 260. Grant of land to Roger can be found in *Close Rolls of Henry III, 1227–1231*, p. 190.
[30] See Plea Roll no. 62 from 18 April 1244. George Wrottesley, 'Part I: Plea Rolls' in *William Salt Archaeological Society Collections for a History of Staffordshire, Vol.4*, (London: Harrison and Sons, 1883), pp. 1-217, (p. 102).

sustained commitment to reclaiming property she believed to be hers, even from a former brother-in-law after nearly two decades had passed. No records of de Verduns prior to Roesia laid any claim to de Somery lands, implying that she alone had some dealing with them.

Reviewing these facts together; the proximity and aligned aspirations of each family, the similarity in their ages, the fact that their son was living with Nicholas de Verdun and both Nicholas and Roesia were ordered to remit the boy to the Earl of Chester, and that Roesia later sued the boy's uncle over a land dispute she alone appears to have had with the family, all lend credence to the conclusion that William Perceval de Somery was Roesia's first husband.

Roesia's 2nd Husband: Theobald Butler

A 1241 charter from Grace Dieu Priory references endowments made for the souls of Roesia's "husbands", confirming more than one marriage.[31] While her first marriage is less clearly documented, evidence surrounding her second marriage to Theobald II Butler is far more substantial. Like her previous match, the Butler family shared Norman origins and had strong ties to the crown. Their surname derived from the hereditary office of Steward of Ireland, conferred in 1177 as recognition of service and acting as cup-bearer during Henry II's reign.[32]

Theobald II Butler, born in 1200, similar in age to Roesia again, was the only son of the Lord Butler of Ireland. Also, like Roesia, he had been married once before to Joan, daughter of Geoffrey de Marais, the Justicar of Ireland. However, by 1225 he was a widower. Roesia had been a widow for three years by this time, William Perceval de Somery having died in 1222. Three years of widowhood for a woman from a noble and respected family that could have easily found her a match, a woman who was approximately eighteen when she became a widow and thus still a prime candidate for marriage and child-bearing, would appear to have been a conscious choice by her, especially based on the effort that was undertaken to convince her to marry again.

On 4 September 1225, Henry III wrote a letter to Rohesia urging her to marry Theobald Butler, and a second letter to Roesia's father advising him to persuade her to marry:

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[31] Nigel Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun (d. 1247) and Grace Dieu Priory: Endowment Charter and Tomb', *Transactions of the LAHS,* 93 (2019), pp.199-220 (p. 205).
[32] John Lodge and Mervyn Archdall, *The Peerage of Ireland, or, A Genealogical History of the Present Nobility of that Kingdom Vol 4.,* (Dublin: J. Moore, 1789), pp. 1–3.

> Rex Roesia fil[ia] Nich[olas] de Verdun sal[u]t[em]. Sciatis q[uo]d b[?] volum[en] q[uo]d di[lecti] [e]t fi[deli] n[ostri] Theob[aldum] le Butiller si v[iru]m ad hoc p[er]??itis assensu[m] [ve]l viru[m] recipiatis. Et mandatu[m] est Nich[olas] de Verdun q[uo]d ip[s]am Roesia[m] inducere velit ut ip[su]m Theob[aldum] [ve]l viru[m] velit recipe. [33]

The influence of the crown was an effective persuasion, as Roesia did marry Theobald, but the king's letters provide a glimpse into Roesia's feelings towards marriage that such an intervention was needed to facilitate it. Roesia would have been in her early twenties by this time, which would have afforded her ample opportunity to remarry and bear more heirs if she were so inclined. However, the fact that both her father and the King of England had to persuade her to marry Theobald after spending three years as a widow foreshadowed her later petition to the crown to remain unmarried following her second widowhood. Her second marriage, like her first, was relatively brief. Theobald died in Poitou campaigning with Henry III on 19 July 1230.[34]

Roesia and Theobald had at least two children, a son, John, and a daughter, Matilda. Despite the Butler family's prominence, John adopted his mother's surname, likely due to Theobald's elder son, Theobald IV, inheriting the Butler estates.[35] This allowed Roesia's son to carry forward the de Verdun name and legacy. Though it was not only her son John who was involved in advancing the family fortunes.

A record from St Thomas the Martyr Abbey in Dublin references the marriage of Walter de Lacy the younger to "the daughter of Lord Roesia de Verdon, fathered by Lord Theobald Pincera (Butler)".[36] It is unclear if Roesia and Theobald had other children in addition to John and Matilda, but given that their marriage only lasted five years it would be unlikely that many more children could have been born to them, and no records of additional children survive.

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[33] Translated as: "King. Roesia, daughter of Nicholas de Verdun, greetings. Know that [?] volume which our beloved and faithful Theobald le Butler, if you accept this man [?] to this assent. And it has been commanded to Nicholas de Verdun that he wishes to induce the same Roesia to accept Theobald that he wants." *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum in Turri Londinensi Asservati, Vol 2: 1224–1227*, ed. by Thomas Duffy Hardy, (London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1844), p. 60. The author gratefully acknowledges the transcription and translation assistance of Dr. Katie Hawks.

[34] Thomas Carte, *The Life of James, Duke of Ormond,* (Oxford: University Press, 1851) p xxvii.

[35] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 63. More on the Butler lineage in George Edward Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom Vol 2. (London: St Catherine Press. 1910)*, p.448, and in Carte, *The Life of James,* p xxvii.

[36] Edward de Lacy-Bellingari, *The Roll of the House of Lacy,* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1928), p. 34.

Therefore, it was likely Matilda who is referenced in this marriage record. As prominent as the Butler family were, it is the de Verdun name which was given first in the record and is a contemporary example of the importance given to the de Verdun name. This also may indicate that Roesia had taken the lead in establishing the marriage contract. Further investigation into this marriage will be undertaken in the next section.

Use of the matronymic was not unprecedented, though it was generally observed when the status of the mother's family outranked that of her husband. In a study of early medieval surnames on the continent of Europe, it was noted that association with a mother's surname was most often to be found within the elite class of nobles, knights, and kings who would have had property, titles, and wealth to pass on to their heirs. In the region of northern France, where the de Verdun family originated from, the percentage of identifications by matronym grew from zero in the tenth century to six percent in the eleventh century and continued to rise to eight percent in the twelfth century.[37] The practice of adopting a matronymic surname would therefore not have been foreign to the Normans and it shows the importance and status of the de Verdun name that Roesia worked to maintain in her lifetime, particularly following the death of her second husband in 1230 and commencement of a new phase in her personal and social evolution.

[37] David Herlihy, 'Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe, 701–1200', in *Women in Medieval Society*, ed. by S. Stuard (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), pp. 13–46, (pp. 15–22).

Part 2: Roesia Becomes a *Femme Sole*

Marriage was a strategic tool for the de Verdun family, particularly as a means of expanding landholdings and income. Traditionally, a *maritagium*, property transferred as part of a marriage, was granted to the husband alone. However, throughout the twelfth century English practices shifted toward joint land grants to married couples, enabling widows to retain control over such property to use as they wished. Unlike dower, which provided for a widow from her husband's estate, these joint grants empowered women with broader economic agency.[38]

Widows also held legal advantages unavailable to unmarried women. Ranulf de Glanville, Henry II's Chief Justicar, is believed to have authored a c. 1188 treatise detailing criteria for inheritance. The document specified that female heirs remained under the custody of their lord unless they had ben lawfully married and widowed, at which point they were exempt from such oversight.[39] A woman who had the legal right to independently manage her own property was known as a *femme sole*, literally translated as a 'woman alone'. A successful petition, and determination of the appropriate fine, entitled her to additional autonomy to manage property, decline remarriage, and have responsibility of minor heirs.

Fine Roll entries from Henry II, Richard I, and John confirm that women were successful with *femme sole* petitions under each monarch.[40] Roesia's paternal grandmother, also named Rohesia, had been one of these women, as she paid twenty pounds to Richard I in 1198 for marriage "peace". [41] As Roesia was approximately ten years old when her grandmother died, it is likely the two would have coexisted long enough for Roesia to have had direct personal

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[38] Claire de Trafford *The Contract of Marriage: The* Maritagium *from the Eleventh to the Thirteenth Century,* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1999) pp. iii–iv, 1.

[39] The treatise was known as the "Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Kingdom of England", see John Beames, *A Translation of Glanville,* (Washington D.C.: John Byrne & Co, 1900), pp. iv, 147.

[40] For example, Henry II fined Countess Matilda, widow of William, Earl of Warwick, 700 marks c. 1185 for ownership of her father's land, her dower, and freedom from marrying against her will. *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Thirty-First Year of the Reign of King Henry the Second,* ed. by J.H. Round (Vaduz: Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1966), p. 76. In 1190, Richard I fined Emma, widow of William Aernulfi 20 marks for liberty to marry if she chose. *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Second Year of the Reign of Richard the First*, ed. by Doris M. Stenton (London, J. W. Ruddock & Sons, 1925), p. 111. Several examples of fines John levied to widows petitioning for the liberty to marry can be found in *Rotuli de Oblatìs et Finìbus in Turri Londinensi Asservati, Tempore Regìs Johannis,* ed. by Thomas Duffy Hardy (London: Great Britain Record Commission, 1835), pp. xxxi-xxxv.

[41] It will be recalled from Part 1 of this work that Bertram III died in 1192 in the Holy Land, some six years before his widow Rohesia petitioned for marriage autonomy. The detailed entry reads "Rohesia de Verdun reddunt compotum de xx libra pro pace habenda pro se maritanda" in *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Tenth Year of the Reign of King Richard the First*, Doris M. Stenton, ed. (London: J.W. Ruddock & Sons, 1932), p.160.

familiarity with her.[42] It is plausible that the actions of her grandmother provided Roesia with a direct model of female independence which influenced her own decisions once widowed.

In 1231, following the deaths of her second husband and father, Roesia successfully petitioned the crown to become a *femme sole*. Her Fine Roll entry dated 23 October 1231 records a fine of 700 marks, structured in four installments across 1232 and 1233:

> Rose, daughter and heiress of Nicholas de Verdun, has made fine with the king by 700 m. for her relief and for having seisin of all lands formerly of Nicholas on the day he died, which fall to her by hereditary right, and that she is not distrained to marry, on condition, indeed, that if she will wish to be married she may not do this without the will and license of the king, and therefore the king has taken her homage. Rose is to render 175 m. of which 700 m. to the king at the Exchequer at Easter in the sixteenth year, 175 m. at Michaelmas in the same year, 175 m. at Easter in the seventeenth year, and 175 m. at Michaelmas in the same year. Order to the sheriff of Warwickshire and Leicestershire to cause those to have full seisin without delay of all lands formerly of Nicholas in his bailiwick on the day he died, which fall to her by inheritance. It is written in the same manner to the sheriffs of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire and the justiciar of Ireland, excepting the terms.[43]

This sum, roughly equivalent to £340,000 in modern value, illustrates both her determination and considerable resources.[44] Once she had secured this freedom, she did not waste any time in exercising her newfound rights. The following day, the Close Rolls note her prompt claim to Theobald Butler's English lands as dower.[45]

The result that Roesia would be successful in her petition was not a foregone conclusion. Most widows were granted autonomy over land and heirs but few were granted full marital

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[42] Rohesia died by 17 January 1215. *Rotuli Vol.1: 1204–1224,* ed. Hardy, p. 184.
[43] National Archives, *Henry III Fine Rolls Project*, [Accessed 20 January 2025].
[44] The University of Nottingham indicates that a mark was worth the equivalent of two-thirds of a pound in this period. Thus, 700 marks would be approximately £467 at the time. See University of Nottingham, *Manuscripts and Special Collections Research Guidance*, n.d., https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/researchguidance/weightsandmeasures/money.aspx [Accessed 17 December 2024]. The National Archives provides a tool to approximate the value of medieval pounds in current value based on a 2017 valuation. The earliest year offered for conversion is 1270, but it is a close approximation for the fine Roesia was issued in 1231 and was used to determine the approximate equivalency of Roesia's fine in modern value. See The National Archives, *Currency Converter: 1270-2017*, n.d., https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/ [Accessed 17 December 2024].
[45] *Close Rolls of Henry III, 1227–1231,* p. 572.

liberty, and those that received it, like Roesia, were typically conditional. Many widows were prohibited from marrying royal enemies or were required to seek the king's permission should she choose to wed again.

It is worth nothing that women were far from absent in the legal and administrative records of the thirteenth century. The Fine Rolls of Henry III reveal a steady stream of female petitioners, particularly widows, engaging with the crown to negotiate land rights, defend property claims, and asset their legal standing. Many appeared to request writs *ad terminum,* which allowed them to reclaim or extend leases on inherited lands, or pursue an *assize of novel disseisin*, a legal resolution for property that had been unlawfully seized. These actions reflect a well-established pattern of women navigating the judicial system to protect their economic interests, often paying modest fines for favorable judgements.[46] In this respect, Roesia was on par with her contemporaries.

However, while such petitions were common, they rarely resulted in the full spectrum of legal freedoms Roesia sought and was granted. The act of petitioning in itself was not exceptional, but what distinguished Roesia from her contemporaries was the scope and success of her claim. Of seventy-six petitions by women granted by Henry III throughout his fifty-six year reign, or referenced in his Fine Rolls as carried over from John's tenure, only ten women, approximately thirteen percent, received the maximum freedoms over property, heirs, and remarriage.[47] Roesia was among this select group. Her case reflects a conscious departure from the more transactional or reactive petitions of her contemporaries, positioning her as a woman who actively shaped her legal identity rather than merely responding to circumstances. A compilation of widows fined by Henry III in exchange for various rights has been provided in the Appendix Table 2. The data provided in Table 2 is plotted in the Appendix Chart 1 for a visual representation of how infrequent each allowance was granted.

Because the Fine Rolls were primarily administrative instruments designed to record payments owed to the crown, they only offer a selective view of legal activity by documenting only those petitions that resulted in financial transactions or royal concessions. As such, they reflect successful negotiations rather than the full spectrum of requests made by women seeking

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[46] For examples, see Fine Roll C 60/49 for fines assigned to Isabella, widow of Gilbert of Bedford, Juliana, widow of William Wambeys, Agnes, widow of Geoffrey de Verly, Matilda, widow of Thomas de Perin, and nearly a dozen more widows. National Archives, *Henry III Fine Rolls Project*, [Accessed 9 February 2025].
[47] National Archives, *Henry III Fine Rolls Project*, [Accessed 25 January 2025].

autonomy. Petitions that were denied, dismissed, or never formally recorded remain invisible in this dataset, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of how many widows actively pursued legal independence but were refused. This archival void complicates any attempt to quantify female agency in the period and cautions against interpreting the surviving records as the full view of broader social norms.

Despite this gap, the broader societal movement toward female property rights, particularly among widows, suggests that such petitions were likely more frequent that the extant data implies. The increasing appearance of women in legal and financial records during this period points to a growing awareness of and engagement with the mechanisms of landholding and inheritance. Within this context, Roesia's successful petition early in the reign of Henry III stands out as a rare example of one of the few widows who were granted one of the broadest scopes of autonomy across more than fifty years.

Though legally independent following her successful *femme sole* petition, Roesia was not without counsel in managing her estates. Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln (1235 — 1253), was an influential figure for her, including his involvement in founding Grace Dieu Priory.[48] During the same period Roesia was executing her *femme sole* freedoms and responsibilities, Grosseteste composed a set of household governance rules for Margaret de Quincy, Countess of Lincoln, following her widowhood in 1240. [49] Given his involvement in Roesia's affairs, it is likely he offered her similar guidance during her tenure as *femme sole*. It is remarkable to have such an intimate view into the role and responsibilities Roesia would have faced during this period in her life.

Grosseteste's twenty-eight rules cover domestic and administrative concerns, such as maintaining accurate records of rents and tenancy, appointing trustworthy seneschals, and overseeing justice with fairness. Literacy appears presumed, and Roesia's tomb effigy, holding a book to be discussed in a later section, suggests she met this expectation. Economic acumen was equally emphasized, as Grosseteste instructed estate holders to monitor crop yields, calculate annual income, and budget for household needs like bread, ale, and alms. Deviations between projected and actual income served to assess the diligence of stewards and bailiffs. This shows

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[48] Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun', p.203.
[49] Elizabeth Lamond, *Walter of Henley's Husbandry, Together with An Anonymous Husbandry, Seneschaucie, and Robert Grosseteste's Rules* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co.,1890), p. xlii.

the level of mathematical and economic competency Roesia would have had. There was also an expectation in Grosseteste's rules for the lady to settle disputes and direct her seneschals to "guard and govern" indiscriminately as she commands and not "vex or hurt or ruin those who hold of me – rich or poor".[50]

While Grosseteste highlights the importance of having trustworthy representatives to manage land and provide data and information, he is very clear that it is the lady's responsibility to understand these concepts and assume full ownership over her land. Given the assertiveness which Roesia displayed in the courts, it would seem Grosseteste's rules were not difficult for Roesia to follow as a *femme sole*, as she would spend the rest of her life expanding and defending her land.

In addition to her English territories, Roesia undertook deliberate efforts to recover historic de Verdun holdings in Ireland, including territory near Dundalk originally transferred to Hugh de Lacy through his marriage to Roesia's Aunt Leselina c. 1194 – 1999. Around 1235, Roesia negotiated the return of these lands for £200.[51]

The transaction was likely facilitated by, or at least complemented by, her children's marriages into the de Lacy family. Roesia's daughter, assumed to be Matilda as discussed previously from Roesia's marriage to Theobald II Butler, married Walter de Lacy the Younger, grandnephew of Hugh, while Roesia's son John married Hugh's grandniece, Margaret de Lacy.[52] These unions, though consistent with aristocratic norms, appear driven less by expansion and more by restitution. Roesia appeared determined to reclaim ancestral lands rather than secure new ones through these marriages, though ultimately the de Verduns did acquire more land eventually as a result, so perhaps her intention was to accomplish both. Matilda's marriage to Walter de Lacy produced no surviving heirs, thereby nullifying any strategic efforts by Roesia to leverage the marriage as a conduit for reclaiming the de Verdun estates in Ireland.[53] John's union with Margaret, however, enabled him to eventually inherit de Lacy lands in England and half the lordship of Meath as his wife was one of two surviving heirs of her grandfather's estate. [54] By aligning to a powerful family, the de Lacy marriages had benefits beyond only helping to secure

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[50] Elizabeth Lamond, *Walter of Henley,* pp. 123-131.
[51] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, pp. 68, 74.
[52] Edward de Lacy-Bellingari, *House of Lacy,* pp. 55-56.
[53] Edward de Lacy-Bellingari, *House of Lacy,* p. 42.
[54] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, pp. 63, 256.

Roesia's Irish claims, but marrying both of her surviving children into the de Lacy family would have better ensured that the de Verdun lands would end up in back in their hands through one child or the other.

Also supporting the notion that Roesia had a determined goal to reclaim the Irish de Verdun lands was the fact that, once the lands were returned to Roesia, she no longer sought alliances with the de Lacy family. By the time Walter de Lacy, Matilda's husband died, Roesia would have completed her payments for the return of the land and was in full ownership of it. Soon after Walter de Lacy died, Matilda married John fitz Alan, Earl of Arundel. Roesia was still alive at this time to have been involved in the marriage arrangements and seems to have turned her attention from the de Lacy family for this marriage.

The fitz Alan marriage was not without some conflict for Roesia, however, as she was sued by executors of the will of John fitz Alan the elder, whose son her daughter had married, claiming Roesia owed money to the estate. Roesia successfully petitioned to delay asset distraint until the debt's legitimacy could be determined.[55] This episode further underscores Roesia's vigilant stewardship over her assets and her resolve to safeguard her interests.

Roesia's efforts to secure land were not limited to de Verdun claims alone. In 1243, Roesia claimed Stoke Farthing in Wiltshire as heir to her maternal grandfather, Philip Butler.[56] This manor, geographically removed from de Verdun lands, became part of her long-term legacy, with the family holding title well into the fourteenth century.[57] That no prominent Butler ownership of Stoke Farthing is recorded prior to Roesia's plea suggests her efforts were instrumental in securing its place within the de Verdun estate. That same year, she also pursued claims in Leicestershire linked to her uncle Robert de Verdun, likely in response to his failure to produce heirs, which is further evidence of her meticulous consolidation of hereditary property.[58]

Ownership of these lands came with certain responsibilities to the crown, which Roesia was accountable for and complied with. As baroness of Alton, Roesia was responsible for military service to the crown when called upon by the crown in times of war or conflict.[59] If a

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[55] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 63.
[56] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 66–67.
[57] Jane Freeman and Janet H Stevenson, 'Parishes: Broad Chalke', in *A History of the County of Wiltshire: Volume 13, South-West Wiltshire: Chalke and Dunworth Hundreds*, ed. D A Crowley (London, 1987), pp. 36–52.
[58] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, pp. 66–67.
[59] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 6.

lord was unable or unwilling to provide military service as a knight, which presumedly would have been the case for Roesia and other women, a knight's fee, or scutage, would be levied to cover the wages of a knight who may need to be hired to serve in substitution for the lord performing the service themselves. Scutage was fixed at a standard value, but the king could levy an additional fine in lieu of service which was a much more arbitrary amount and subsequent monarchs steadily increased fines, which could be as high as 15 marks under John or 25 marks under Henry III.[60]

In 1234, during Henry III's campaign against Richard Marshal, Roesia paid ten marks to cover one knight's fee, more than double the standard scutage rate at the time.[61] This amount also exceeded contemporary male payments recorded in the same roll, suggesting Roesia was disproportionally fined.[62] No comparison in the literature could be found comparing scutage paid by men versus women, but such a work would be an interesting future study into gendered dimensions of these obligations.

Beyond fiscal and military duties, Roesia actively engaged in legal proceedings to defend and assert her land claims in England and Ireland. Her cases ranged from warranty calls to disputes with ecclesiastical and lay claimants.[63] Some suits favored her, while others resulted in her withdrawing her claim.[64]

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[60] James Fosdick Baldwin, *The Scutage and Knight Service in England*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1897), p. 12, 95.

[61] *Calendar of the Fine Rolls of Henry III Vol II: 1224–1234*, p. 522. Scutage around this period was charged at three marks per knight's fee, see Sydney Knox Mitchell, *Studies in Taxation under John and Henry III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914), p. 191.

[62] By comparison, the abbot of Tavistock was fined 25 marks for seven knight's fees (four additional marks in fees over the standard), Robert de Treleg was fined 4 marks for one knight's fee (only one additional mark in fees), and Ralph of Rochester was fined 15 marks for five knight's fees (zero additional fees). *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland*, *1171–1251,* ed. H. S. Sweetman (London: Longman & Co., 1875), p. 522.

[63] Roesia had several calls of warranty to respond to in 1233, see *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland*, p. 302. In 1235, Roesia found herself a plaintiff against the Abbott of Mellifont who had attorned three carucates of land in "Tauliban", which likely refers to the town of Tigh Líobáin in Louth according to records held by Gaois Research Group, *Placenames Database of Ireland*, 2022, http://www.logainm.ie [Accessed 15 June 2024]. As the de Verdun family owned a large amount of land in Louth, it is reasonable to assume this is the town the Abbot was referring to in his case. *Calendar of the Fine Rolls of Henry III Vol II: 1224–1234*, p. 338. In 1238, Roesia again attorned individuals against plaintiffs holding land in Glummore, Aydevalan and Octerath. *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland*, pp. 365–6.

[64] In January 1247 William de Wasteneys withdrew an earlier claim of assize that he had previously lodged against Roesia and the Prioress of Grace Dieu. See Plea Roll no. 65 from 20 January 1247. Wrottesley, 'Part I: Plea Rolls', pp. 1-217, (p. 103). She was brought to court in December 1240 for two separate disputes, and the records show that she was victorious against Adam de Bukenhale's compliant regarding half a virgate of land, though she was fined a payment of a silver mark to him when he withdrew his claim. In the same session, John Marescall of Wolverhampton won his claim of six bovates of land in Wotton against Roesia. See entries 58 and 62.

Her determination, persistence, and perseverance solidified a formidable reputation. The enduring force of Roesia's presence is evident in a legal dispute brought before Henry III two years after her death in an episode that embodies the impression she left on her contemporaries. William le Marshall sued Roesia's son and heir, John de Verdon, for land which he claimed Roesia had denied him access to. John denied that his mother had unjustly disseised William of it, and the Sheriff was ordered to summon a jury and investigate.[65] Though a resolution was not captured in the records, the fact that William le Marshall delayed his claim until after Roesia's death suggests her presence was a deterrent to legal challenges during her lifetime.

It has been observed that "by the late fourteenth century, the concept of the *femme sole* had been firmly established in English common law and society", and not just for aristocratic widows but for women in the mercantile class who legally and independently operated businesses and conducted trade while their husbands were alive.[66] This evolution took two centuries, evolving from Robert Granville's *Treatise* c. 1189. Roesia's assertive stewardship spanned her entire widowhood, illustrating an early emergence of the *femme sole* model. From the time she was granted *femme sole* status in 1231 to the end of her life sixteen years later, Roesia de Verdun consistently leveraged legal mechanisms to expand, reinforce, and defend the de Verdun family's status and holdings. Her influence did not end with her death, however, as it endures in the physical legacies she left behind which remain to be studied today.

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[65] See Plea Roll no. 71 from 32 Henry III. Wrottesley, 'Part I: Plea Rolls', pp. 1-217, (p. 128).
[66] Brian W. Gastle, '"As If She Were Single": Working Wives and the Late Medieval English *Femme Sole*', in *The Middle Ages at Work: Practicing Labor in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Kellie Robertson and Michael Uebel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 41-64, (p. 43).

Part 3: Roesia's Material Legacy

As Bedos-Rezak observes, medieval aristocrats defined themselves through "sign-objects", which were tangible symbols of identity, morality, and status. These enduring artefacts include estates, castles, religious foundations, and personal representations such as seals and effigies.[67] Though only about forty-three at her death, Roesia de Verdun leveraged her substantial inheritance to create a lasting material legacy. Like other noblewomen, she patronized religious institutions, but she distinguished herself by independently founding at least one castle and fostering commercial vitality at a new settlement in Dundalk. Her actions reflected her exceptional autonomy and strategic vision.

Spiritual, Secular, and Fortified Structures

For medieval widows, founding religious institutions served layered purposes across spiritual, familial, social, and status drivers. Such endowments secured perpetually intercessory prayer for the founder's soul and extended spiritual benefits to loved ones. They also publicly signaled wealth and influence, as establishing and sustaining a religious house required substantial resources and long-term commitment. Not every religious house would be successful, which validates the importance of having a patron wealthy enough to support the organization initially but also in perpetuity.[68]

Beyond religious merit, these institutions offered sanctuary for women. As Power notes, "convents were the refuge of the gently born," providing elite women an alternative to marriage.[69] In addition, they served as bastions of education, social care, and community support in a time without secular aid systems as sick and injured persons would frequently utilize religious institutions for care.[70] Roesia founded at least two religious sites, one in Ireland and one

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[67] Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, 'Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept' in *The American Historical Review* 105(5) (2000), pp. 1489-1533 (p. 1532).

[68] For example, a small Augustinian nunnery was founded in Rothwell, Northampton, in the thirteenth century by an unknown patron who did not endow the site well, as by 1318 the nuns were granted a license from the bishop to beg for alms on account of their poverty. R.M. Serjeantson and W.R.D. Adkins, eds., 'House of Austin nuns: The nunnery of Rothwell', in *A History of the County of Northampton: Volume 2*, (London, 1906), pp. 137–138.

[69] See Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 6.

[70] Kenny, *Gaelic Women in Ireland,* p. 162.

in England, and the choice of order she decided to support are another example of her as an early adopter of new ideas.

Dundalk Friary

Although Roesia's grandfather was the first of the de Verduns to establish religious institutions in Dundalk, namely the church of St. John the Baptist and the hospital of St. Leonard (c. 1188), the Franciscan Friary in Dundalk is widely believed to have been founded by Roesia.[71] While direct founding documentation is missing, contextual evidence strongly supports her role. Between 1220-1260, there was a marked rise in women founding monastic sites in Ireland, often in their own names.[72] As a *femme sole* with legal control over the Dundalk lands from 1231 onward, Roesia possessed both the authority and means to sponsor such a foundation.

Ware later attributed the friary's creation to Roesia's son, John, but a 1246 papal letter confirms the site was operational during Roesia's lifetime, well before John inherited the estate in 1247.[73] Roesia would have been familiar with the Franciscan order, which arrived in England in the fall of 1224 and sought to establish communities in urban areas, through her association with Bishop Grosseteste. Within three decades of arriving in England, more than 1200 members of the order across forty-nine locations were established.[74] Of the nine Franciscans who formed the first mission in England, one priest was later sent to Ireland to establish a ministry in that country, and he is believed to have arrived by 1232.[75] The timing of these events aligns with Roesia's leadership of the de Verdun affairs, so it is unlikely any of her predecessors would have founded a Franciscan site in Dundalk.

The Dundalk friary quickly grew in stature, evidenced by its hosting of the Archbishop of Armagh's consecration of the new Vicar in 1253, which would have been a notable event.[76] Architecturally, its eastern window drew admiration for its craftsmanship, and its inclusion of

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[71] Harold O'Sullivan, *Irish Historic Town Atlas No. 16*, pp. 1-2.
[72] Dianne Hall, *Women and the Church in Medieval Ireland, c. 1140–1540*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), pp. 57–60.
[73] Sir James Ware, *The Antiquities and History of Ireland*, (Dublin: by A. Crook, printer to the Queen, 1705), p. 91. The paper letter was sent from Pope Innocent IV to the Friday in October 1246 per E.B. Fitzmaurice and A.G. Little, *Materials for the history of the Franciscan province of Ireland, A.D. 1230–1450*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920), p 13.
[74] C.H Lawrence (ed. and trans), *The Letters of Adam Marsh: Volume I*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. xiiv.
[75] Fitzmaurice and Little, *Ireland, A.D. 1230–1450*, pp. xi–xiiv.
[76] Fitzmaurice and Little, *Ireland, A.D. 1230–1450*, pp. 20-21.

plumbing and multiple buildings by the time of the dissolution attests to substantial early investment and long-term stability.[77] Whether by initial design or later enhancement, the friary's enduring prominence reflects Roesia's thoughtful and ambitious patronage. Her investment in both the spiritual and infrastructural dimensions of the site suggests a deliberate effort to establish a lasting legacy.

Grace Dieu Priory

Unlike the undocumented founding of Dundalk Friary, the charter for Grace Dieu Priory in Leicestershire, established between 1235 and 1241, is known and offers detailed insight. Roesia endowed the house with the manors of Belton and Kirby in Kesteven, citing the "salvation of my soul and of my parents, ancestors, and successors" as her purpose, in keeping with contemporary spiritual conventions.[78]

Though some speculate that Roesia built Grace Dieu to avoid remarriage and retreat into religious life, this is unlikely.[79] She had already secured her marriage autonomy before the priory's founding and never formally joined the order. The first prioress of Grace Dieu is given as Mary of Stretton, appointed while Roesia was still alive.[80] Furthermore, the Rule of St. Augustine required members to relinquish personal property when they joined the order.[81] The effort and cost Roesia put into becoming a *femme sole* and her persistent legal efforts to retain and manage her estates would have been incongruous with this Rule. There are records of medieval noblewomen retiring to the religious communities they founded without formally

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[77]Sir James Ware stated that the "eastern window whereof, for the excellency of the work, was heretofore much admired in Ireland". Sir James Ware, *The Antiquities and History of Ireland*, (Dublin: by A. Crook, printer to the Queen, 1705), p. 91. Plumbing at the site is confirmed by 1311 when Richard Touker was charged with breaking a pipe at the friary and stealing from the spring. The site was robbed and vandalized in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, again indicating that it has been well-endowed enough to be a target for thieves well beyond its founding. Fitzmaurice and Little, *Ireland, A.D. 1230–1450*, pp. xxiv-xxxiv, 190-218.
[78] Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun', pp. 199, 217.
[79] Marjorie Schulz, *Gracedieu & Garendon…Revisited* (Loughborough: Panda Eyes Limited, 2009), p. 6.
[80] 'House of Augustinian nuns: The Priory of Grace Dieu', in Hoskins, W. G. and McKinley, R. A. (eds.) *A History of the County of Leicestershire: Volume 2* (London: Victoria County History, 1954), British History Online, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/leics/vol2/pp27-28, [Accessed March 23, 2025].
[81] Hugh of St. Victor, *Explanation of the Rule of St. Augustine*, translated by Dom Aloysius Smith (London: Sands & Company, 1911), p. 12.

becoming a nun, so it may be that Roesia did this and it was later interpreted as her joining the order.[82]

Roesia's reason for establishing the priory can be found in the charter. She explained "the faithful and wise servant ought to render with interest the talent that has been given him, I, however, a weak and very feeble handmaid of the Lord, wishing that at least part of the talent given to me is to be placed at the feet of the Lord" as part of her reasoning for establishing the site.[83] It is doubtful that a frequent petitioner at the royal court defending her interests and future builder of an Irish castle was ever a 'weak and feeble' woman, and this rhetorical posture is at odds with her assertive public actions. Such sentiments would rather have been in keeping with the conventional humility expected of aristocratic women of the time.

Significantly, Roesia chose the Augustinian order for Grace Dieu rather than the more popular Benedictine rule which dominated female monastic foundations in this period.[84] Equally striking is her rejection of the Cistercian order, despite her family's enduring ties to it. Her grandfather, Bertram III de Verdun, had selected Cistercian monks from Aunay-sur-Odon in Normandy, a house previously established by his relative, to found his Abbey at Croxden.[85]

Roesia's choice of the Augustinian rule signaled a conscious reorientation of religious patronage, suggesting both personal agency and strategic differentiation within the landscape of female monasticism. Of the 138 known medieval English nunneries, fewer than twenty followed the Augustinian rule, and even fewer were founded solely by women.[86] Grace Dieu joins only three others: Bristol (c. 1173 by Eva Fitzharding), Lacock Abbey (1232. Ela Longspee) and Flixton (1258, Margery de Crek).[87] Table 3 in the Appendix catalogues all known medieval

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[82] Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 67-69.
[83] Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun', p. 217.
[84] In addition to Benedictine or Augustinian houses, there were also Cluniacs, Cistercians, and Premonstratensians established in England by this time, but more than half of the nunneries were Benedictine. David Knowles and R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1953), pp 18, 53.
[85] Peter Ellis, 'Croxden Abbey, Staffordshire: Report on Excavations, 1956-57 and 1975-77', *Staffordshire Archaeological & Historical Society Transactions 1994-1995,* 36 (1997), 29-51 (p. 29).
[86] Power, *Medieval English Nunneries,* p. 1.
[87] For St. Mary Magdalen in Bristol see *A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 2*, (London, 1907), p. 93. For Lacock in Wiltshire see National Trust, *History of Lacock Abbey*, https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/wiltshire/lacock/history-of-lacock-abbey [Accessed 1 January 2024]. For Flixton in Suffolk, see 'Houses of Austin nuns: Priory of Flixton', in William Page (ed.), A History of the County of Suffolk: Volume 2, (London, 1975), pp. 115–117.

English nunneries founded by women, and it reveals a notable pattern. While the majority of female monastic houses were affiliated with the Benedictine order, those established solely by women were disproportionately aligned with alternative religious orders. Further exploration into the other women founders could shed some light on this divergence. It could have been that women with the interest and means to found a religious site independently, like Roesia, were aligned with the ideals of reform and change as a common theme.

Roesia appears to have aligned with the Augustinian order from the outset given their selection in the original charter. The 1241 confirmation charter also notes that Grace Dieu was established with Bishop Grosseteste's blessing, suggesting episcopal influence played a role in her choice.[88] Grosseteste was an influential figure in the region, acknowledged as a prominent scholar, philosopher, scientist, and theologian. He was elected Bishop of Lincoln in 1235, and his works drew heavily from those of Saint Augustine. Prior to supporting the Augustinian movement, Grosseteste was also an early supporter of the Franciscans due to their propensity to live a more mendicant life which Grosseteste felt was a necessary reform within the church at the time.[89] Grosseteste's deep engagement with Augustinian theology and prior support for Franciscans suggests his dual involvement in both Grace Dieu and the Dundalk Franciscan Friary.

Roesia endowed Grace Dieu lavishly, granting the manor of Belton with extensive rights and resources, including meadows, mills, rents, and villeinage. Her ability to fund such a foundation just years after settling her costly *femme sole* fine underscores her financial prowess and strategic stewardship.[90] She remained actively involved, securing market and fair rights in 1244 and covering expenses on behalf of the priory in 1245, just two years before her death.[91]

The years following her death in 1247 saw rising concerns from prominent ecclesiastical figures in the region. Adam Marsh, a Franciscan cleric, wrote to Bishop Grosseteste,

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[88] Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun', p. 206.
[89] Robert Grosseteste, *Episcopi quondam Lincolniensis epistolae,* ed. by Henry Richards Luard, (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), pp. xxi-xxii, xc. Grosseteste was the first lector to the Oxford Franciscan community upon its founding around 1229. Giles Gasper 'How to Teach the Franciscans: Robert Grosseteste and the Oxford Community of Franciscans c. 1229-35" in *Franciscan Studies: The Significance of St. Francis and Franciscan Traditions of Theology, Spirituality, and Action*, ed. by Lydia Schumacher (De Gruyter, 2021), p.60.
[90] Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun', p. 217.
[91] For 1244 records, see *Calendar of the Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, Vol 1: Henry III 1226–1257*, ed. H.C. Maxwell Lyte (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1903), p. 277. For 1245 records see *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in the Public Record Office, A.D. 1242–1247*, ed. H.C. Maxwell Lyte (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), p. 299.

archbishops, and nobles in the early 1250's lamenting the site's decline. His letters describe a moral deterioration corrupting convent life at the site and calling for the removal of the prioress as the source of the problem.[92] Unfortunately the records of Grace Dieu do not capture the name of the prioress during the initial years following Roesia's death, so it is difficult to investigate Marsh's claims in detail.[93] His concern may have come from an actual decline in religious discipline following Roesia's death, or it may have been that the site always operated a certain way but Roesia's strong leadership had previously shielded the priory from external scrutiny. As covered previously, secular records show that some individuals did not appear eager to face Roesia in court, so they waited until after her death to dispute actions she had taken in life. Perhaps the concerns voiced by Marsh follow the same pattern in the ecclesiastic world.

Despite Marsh's grave concerns, Grace Dieu remained active until the Dissolution in 1528, which is a testament to her lasting material and spiritual influence. Her attentiveness to sustainability is mirrored at Dundalk, where the friary flourished under her patronage. The 1246 papal letter addressed to Dundalk's Guardian regarding the contested Archbishopric of Armagh highlights the friary's role in such a high-level affair and confirms its prominence. The Friary in Dundalk was part of an apparent larger initiative to spur development in the region, particular in the town of Newtown.

Newtown of Dundalk

Newtown, located near Dundalk in County Louth, Ireland, is believed to have been significantly developed, if not outright founded, by Roesia.[94] Located approximately 1.25 miles east of Castletown, the original Norman settlement founded by her grandfather Bertram III, Newtown appears to have emerged as a distinct commercial center under Roesia's oversight (see Figure 1).[95] While definitive documentation is lacking, the timing of her inheritance of Dundalk in 1231, her agreement with de Lacy for the surrounding area in 1235, and the friary's establishment by 1246 supports her role in shaping its growth.

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[92] See his letters numbered 27, 31 in Lawrence, *Letters of Adam Marsh,* pp.73, 91. Marsh wrote again when he did not feel the site had improved in letter 237 in Lawrence, *Letters of Adam Marsh,* p.557.
[93] 'House of Augustinian nuns', Hoskins and McKinley (eds.), [Accessed March 23, 2025].
[94] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 73.
[95] Paul Gosling, 'From Dun Delca to Dundalk: the topography and archaeology of a medieval frontier town A.D. c. 1187-1700,' *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society,* Vol. 22, No. 3 (County Louth Archaeological and History Society, 1991) pp. 221, 223-353 (pp. 252-254, 263).

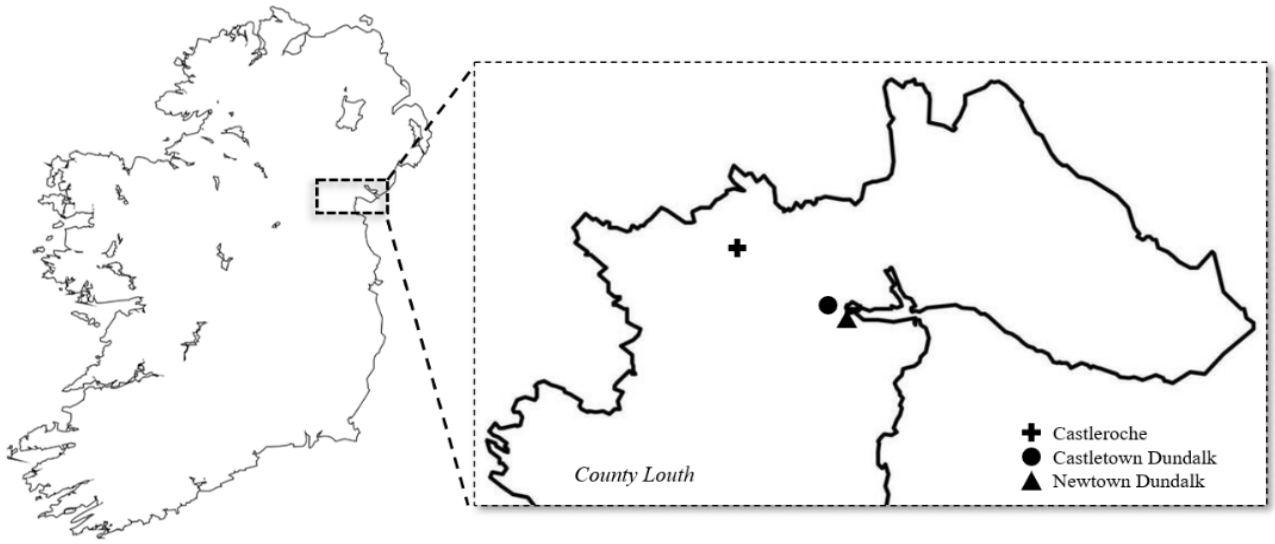

Figure 1. Placement of Castleroche, Castletown and Newtown in the Dundalk region. Author's own map.

As previously discussed, the de Verdun lands had been diverted to Hugh de Lacy through his marriage to Roesia's Aunt Leselina in the late twelfth century and only returned to de Verdun control following Roesia's legal agreement with de Lacy in 1235. The de Verduns recognized the strategic and economic importance of the area around Castletown and Athlon harbor as those were specifically not part of the marriage portion of Leselina when she married Hugh de Lacy.[96] Notably, or perhaps as a result of not holding these important sections of the region, de Lacy showed limited investment in Louth, focusing instead on his Meath holdings.[97] The absence of development prior to 1235 and the Franciscan preference for emerging urban sites suggest Newtown likely flourished under Roesia's initiative.

Although the de Verduns recognized the importance of the coastal area, and Roesia's father Nicholas received market licenses for Dundalk in 1226 and 1230, it was Roesia who formalized commercial and religious expansion. This is evidenced by the friary's peripheral location to the growing Newtown and its integration with a laboring population, both hallmarks

[96] See Harold O'Sullivan, *Irish Historic Town Atlas No. 16*, p. 1.
[97] Throughout the period from 1217-1230, Hugh de Lacy the Younger had been applying for licenses to hold markets throughout his lands in Meath but he did not do the same in Louth. Gosling, *Dundalk*, p. 264.

of Franciscan engagement.[98] Establishing a thriving city near a seaport would have benefitted the region economically and her strategic planning to be discussed at Castleroche parallels these efforts, underscoring her commitment to fortifying and cultivating prosperity across her holdings. Roesia's development of Newtown was not merely an act of local stewardship, it was a calculated assertion of territorial agency and economic foresight within a contested landscape. By cultivating Newtown a de Vescys a distinct commercial nucleus east of Castletown, she effectively reoriented the region's power dynamics, shifting attention away from the older Norman stronghold of her grandfather and toward a new urban center under her direct influence.

Records from the medieval period provide countless examples of independent women managing property, however as these records only capture the conflict between the women and their tenants in legal disputes it can be difficult to fully reconstruct the scope and nature of their economic agency.[99] An inference can be made from these events, however, as was the case in 1283 when widow Agnes de Vescy decreed that villagers in her town of Malton were not to provide food or have any communication with the brothers of Malton Priory.[100] This episode comes to us from a plea made by the Priory to Edward I which claimed "they had not committed any delinquency" to warrant her wrath. Following Agnes' proclamation, villagers stole food from the monks and prevented them from harvesting or storing food on their lands, so as a result of the petition, Edward granted an investigation into the matter.[101] Clearly the Priory had committed some grievance against Agnes, and it is also very clear she exhibited enough influence over the town that the inhabitants complied with her decree, though whether through genuine support of her or fear of similar repercussions is unknown.

The episode involving Agnes de Vescy demonstrates the challenge in reconstructing the full extent of medieval women's economic agency from court records alone. Roesia's involvement with Newtown in Dundalk emerges not from legal disputes but from architectural, religious and economic traces, creating a similar legacy of a women exercising territorial control

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[98] Gosling¸ *Dundalk*, pp. 263-265. See also Harold O'Sullivan, 'The Beginnings of the Catholic Parishes of Dundalk, Haggardstown and Kilkerly in the, County of Louth', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, 19(2) (2003), 1-52 (p. 8).
[99] See Linda Mitchell, 'The Lady is a Lord: Noble Widows and Land in Thirteenth-Century Britain', *Historical Reflections*, 18(1) (1992), 71-97.
[100] Mitchell, 'Lady is a Lord', p. 72.
[101] *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Edward I, 1272-1307, Vol 2.*, H.C. Maxwell Lyte (ed.) (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1893), p. 78.

and shaping civic life. Both Roesia and Agnes operated within the bounds of widowhood and noble status to assert authority over land and people, albeit one through constructive patronage and the other through punitive exclusion. Together these cases illuminate the multifaceted ways medieval women could wield power, inviting future scholarship to move beyond conflict-driven narratives and uncover additional constructive examples of female agency in medieval property management.

Castleroche and the Politics of Marchland Authority

While Roesia's development of Newtown exemplifies constructive civic and religious patronage, her commissioning of Castleroche reveals a third facet of female authority through strategic fortification. Far from undermining her role as a builder of prosperity, Castleroche represents the protective infrastructure necessary to sustain what she was creating. In a volatile frontier region, defense and development were not opposing impulses but interdependent imperatives.

Synnott contends that the conquest of Ireland was shaped more decisively by the influence and expansion of Norman feudal lords than by direct English military intervention.[102] This interpretation illuminates the pivotal role of Anglo-Norman landholding families, such as the de Verduns, in consolidating English authority through territorial control and dynastic networks, rather than through sustained martial conquest.

Within this context, Roesia de Verdun's construction of Castleroche in County Louth was both an unprecedented architectural achievement and a strategic assertion of authority. The Close Rolls of July 1236 noted that she fortified a stronghold none of her predecessors could achieve, and she received royal support to expand further:

> Rex dilecto et fideli suo M. filio Geroldi, justiciario suo Hibernie, salutem. Significastis nobis una cum venerabili in Christo patre L. Dublinensi archiepiscopo, quod dilecta nobis Roesia de Verdun firmavit quoddam castrum bonum et forte in terra sua propria super Hibernienses, quod nullus predecessorum suorum potuit facere, et adhuc aliud castrum firmare proponit ad magnam securitatem terre nostre. Quia vero prefata Roesia operationem predictam absque subsidio bene non poterit consummare, de consilio nostro vobis mandamus quatinus servitium nobis debitum de Myde et Uriel ei per quadraginta

[102] Synnott, 'Notes on the Family of De Lacy', p.116.

dies habere faciatis ad operationem predictam faciendam, si sine indempnitate nostra hoc fieri non possit. Teste rege apud Theok', vj. die Julii. [103]

Situated on Ireland's volatile marches, Castleroche secured vital communication routes and demonstrated the militarized landscape that characterized Anglo-Norman frontier control. Following its construction, all free tenants of the de Verdun lands in the region, whether they were within the march or not, were required to provide service at Castleroche to maintain its position, further showing the authority Roesia and her representatives had over the region to maintain control.[104]

It would appear a firm hand was needed in the region. Terms such as *castellaria* and *forcelletum,* referencing the fortified lands around a castle, appear in records from this period more frequently than *manor*, reflecting the region's defensive imperatives. County Louth was subjected to rebellion and deadly uprisings by the Irish, as well as repeated invasions by the Scots, and has been considered as one of "the most strategically important of the core regions of English authority in Ireland" by modern historians.[105]

There are no records which explicitly document Roesia's personal involvement in the design of the structure, but novel approaches taken in the style echo her receptivity to novel approaches, mirroring her decisions in selecting newer religious orders for her foundations. Castleroche introduced the innovative feature of a twin-towered gate, later echoed in Henry III's Tower of London expansion which unfortunately does not survive today (see Figure 2).[106] In addition, its placement atop rocky terrain made it exceptionally difficult to besiege (see Figures 3

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[103] Translation: "Greetings from the king to his beloved and faithful son M. Gerold, his justiciar in Hibernia. You signified to us, together with the venerable father in Christ, L. Archbishop of Dublin, that our beloved Roesia de Verdun had fortified a certain good and strong castle in her own country, over the Hibernians, which none of her predecessors could do, and yet she proposes to strengthen another castle for the great security of our land. But because the aforesaid Roesia will not be able to complete the aforesaid operation without assistance, we command you by our advice that you make the service due to us of Myde and Uriel for forty days to carry out the aforesaid operation, if this cannot be done without our indemnity. Witness the king at Theok', on the sixth day of July." *Close Rolls of the Reign of Henry III Preserved in the Public Record Office, vol. 2: A.D. 1234–1237,* ed. H.C. Maxwell Lyte, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1908), p. 364. Translation assistance gratefully provided by Dr. Katie Hawks.

[104] Brendan Smith, 'The Concept of the March in Medieval Ireland: The Case of Uriel', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature*, Vol 88C (December 1988), pp. 257–269.

[105] Brendan Smith, 'A County Community in Early Fourteenth-Century Ireland: The Case of Louth', *The English Historical Review*, 428 (July 1993), p. 562.

[106] Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'Roesia de Verdun and the building of Castleroche, Co. Louth', *The Castle Studies Group Journal*, 28 (2014–15), p. 129.

and 4). Hagger posits that an assembly of castles found around Dundalk may reflect Roesia's broader planning influence, suggesting a strategic network beyond her own estate.[107]

Figure 2. Castleroche, facing west towards the entrance, Author's photograph, 2012

Figure3. Castleroche, facing southwest towards the entrance, Author's photograph, 2012

[107] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 73.

Figure 4. Looking west from inside Castleroche, Author's photograph, 2012

Despite her accomplishments, Roesia's legacy has been distorted by sensationalized oral histories. The defenestration myth may have been corrupted from one twelfth century chronicler Orderic Vitalis is reported to have told, though the femme fatale in his version was the widowed countess of Bayeux, who beheaded her mason once he completed the tower at one of the first stone castles in Normandy in the eleventh century so it could not be duplicated.[108]

Another tale about Roesia places her at the head of an assault against the O'Hanlans in Ireland, though no records substantiate this narrative.[109] This militarized portrayal not only exaggerates her role but also imposes a masculinized framework of authority onto a female figure whose actual power was exercised through landholding, religious patronage and strategic marital alliances.

Such stories exemplify the ways in which Roesia's legacy has been distorted by dramatized histories that prioritize spectacle over substance. Some historians dismiss these stories only because there is no record that Roesia ever traveled to Ireland herself, but this only

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[108] O'Keeffe, 'Castleroche', p. 133.
[109] Kenny, *Gaelic Women in Ireland,* p. 146.

further undermines her significant leadership and authority as the head of the de Verdun family.[110] Given her efforts to reclaim the de Verdun land from Hugh de Lacy and her subsequent building campaigns in the region, it would seem unlikely that she would not have spent time in the Irish lands she was so invested in.

Later parliamentary criticisms of absenteeism on the Irish marches reinforce the likelihood of Roesia's active engagement during her lifetime. The English parliament was so concerned about the deterioration of control at the end of the thirteenth century that it passed a number of statues in 1297 decrying absenteeism in the Irish marches and insisting those responsible for the land to fortify their regions.[111] The chastisement of absentee lords fifty years following Roesia's death suggests that absenteeism had not been seen as such a problem in the first half of the century when Roesia was responsible for a portion of the land.

Tales of murder and warfare surrounding Roesia reflect a deep-seated gender bias, casting aspersions on a woman who, rather than transgressing norms, operated squarely within the legal and feudal frameworks available to her. Rosia asserted her autonomy through sanctioned channels when she reclaimed family lands thought litigation, invested in the construction of a strategically significant fortification, and oversaw its completion. This achievement was all the more remarkable given the rarity of female-led militarily strategic architectural campaigns in the thirteenth century. Her actions, often reframed as aggressive or unseemly in later accounts, reveal not transgression but competence and ambition in a patriarchal landscape that offered few avenues for female authority.

Her substantial payment to secure the status of a *femme sole* following the death of her second husband further affirms this pursuit of legal and economic independence. This act was not merely symbolic, it granted her the right to manage property, enter contracts, and act without male oversight. In choosing to invest in this status and obtain privileges typically denied to women of her station, Roesia demonstrated a strategic understanding of the legal tools available to her and a deliberate commitment to self-governance, reinforcing her role as a shrewd and capable figure in a period that rarely permitted such agency to women.

While Castleroche stands as a monumental testament to Roesia's political authority and architectural ambition, it alone does not fully encapsulate the personal dimensions of her legacy.

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[110] O'Keeffe, 'Castleroche', p. 125.
[111] Smith, 'The Case of Uriel', pp. 257–269.

By turning to her seals and tomb, objects which are imbued with intimate symbolism and self-representation, the final section of this work reveals how Roesia chose to be seen, remembered, and immortalized. These artefacts offer insight into her agency as a medieval woman navigating power, identity, and posterity.

Analyzing these individualized items allows for a shift from an institutional legacy to one of personal narrative. Her seals reflect her strategic self-fashioning in legal and political contexts, while her tomb effigy serves as a curated statement of status, lineage, and memory. Together, they provide a deeper understanding of Roesia not just as builder or conduit of the de Verdun lineage, but as a noblewoman who actively shaped her image across mediums.

Iconography

Seals of Roesia de Verdun

In medieval society, seals functioned as both authentication devices and symbolic representations of identity, particularly for noblewomen like Roesia de Verdun. Individuals in this period are said to have formed a "strong connection" with their seal and took care to select an image that would represent their status and values.[112] While traditionally viewed as pragmatic tools bridging literacy gaps, modern scholarship, such as that of Bedos-Rezak, highlights their role in expressing status, piety, and lineage. Bedos-Rezak recommends a semiotic approach to analyzing medieval seals to more deeply examine how they were used to communicate and create meaning. [113] It is fortunate that one of Roesia's seals is preserved with charters it was affixed to, allowing for an analysis of what her seals convey about her life and legacy.

Most early Norman seals were ecclesiastical or royal, but seals of English noblewomen began to appear by the middle of the twelfth century.[114] Seals were individualized to the person they were made for as they needed to be a visual representation of the person. The die, known as the matrix, was often carved in stone or cast in metal for durability and frequently destroyed or buried when the individual died so documents could not be forged.[115] Medieval seals display an

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[112] John McEwan and Elizabeth A. New eds., *Seals in Context: Medieval Wales and the Welsh Marches*, (Aberystwyth, Cambrian Publishers, 2012), p. 45.
[113] Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, 'Sign Theory, Medieval and Modern', in *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp 55-71, (pp. 55-59).
[114] Susan Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm,* (Manchester: Manchester Press, 2003), p. 126.
[115] Laura J. Whatley, *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 3.

image centered on the seal (the design) with text surrounding the edges (the legend).[116] As a *femme sole* able to manage her own property, Roesia affixed her seal to legal documents, with two excellent examples from the same matrix available for study.[117]

An intact seal from a grant Roesia made to Croxden Abbey depicts her in a long gown, turned toward a covered chalice, emphasizing spiritual commitment (see Figure 5). The object she holds appears to be a chalice or cup with a cover and pronounced knop at the top. Her left hand crosses in front of her gown to her breast, there is some wear at the detail, but she may be clasping the ties of her gown. It does not appear that she is standing on anything as her gown reaches the legend. Roesia's seal is approximately 5cm (2 inches) tall by 4cm (1.5 inches) wide and the text along the outer border of the seal reads: + SIGILLVM ROESIE DE VERDVN. The reverse of the seal does not show a counterseal but has a rounded back with what appears to be fingerprint impressions, adding to its personal authenticity.

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[116] McEwan and New, *Seals,* p. 2.
[117] Staffordshire, Staffordshire Record Office, *Roesia de Verdun seal, 13th c., Quitclaim of Rights in the Wood of Hounds Cheadle,* D593/A/2/23/2 and Staffordshire, Staffordshire Record Office, R*oesia de Verdun seal, 13th c., Grants of Various Lands in Cheadle,* D593/A/2/23/3.

Figure 5. Obverse (left) and reverse (right) of the seal of Roesia de Verdun on quitclaim to Croxden Abbey. Staffordshire Record Office D593/A/2/23/2 Quitclaim of rights in the wood of Hounds Cheadle within given bounds, specifically its seal. Photograph by author, 2024. Reproduced courtesy of Staffordshire Record Office.

The shape of the seal itself is of the "vesica piscis" lozenge style, which is an oval shape with pointed ends, formed by the intersection of two interlocking circles (see Figure 6). The shape was commonly used in early Christianity signifying a fish and representing Christ at the intersection of the earth and heaven.[118] Seals for men are almost always round and often depict them armored and riding on a horse, while most non-royal women and ecclesiastical seals utilized the vesica shape.[119]

[118] Dora Greenfield, 'Art-Designs on Mediaeval Tiles', *The Art Journal,* 1 (1875), 330-332 (p. 330).
[119] Johns, *Noblewomen*, p. 127.

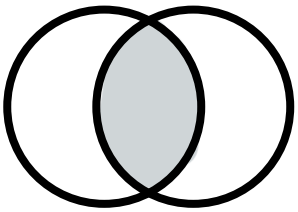

Figure 6. The "vesica piscis" shape is created where two circles overlap as noted in the shaded area in the figure above. The shape was used frequently for women's seals in the medieval period.

Another seal, known from an eighteenth century drawing possible linked to Grace Dieu, presents Roesia holding heraldic shields (see Figure 7).[120] In her dominant dexter hand is the de Verdun arms and in the sinister is the Butler arms. The placement of each shield is significant. Couzin shares that by the Middle Ages right and left "expressed deeply held moral commitments and spiritual beliefs" and greater importance was given to items held in the dexter hand. [121] Depicting Roesia holding the de Verdun arms in her right hand reinforces her prioritization of natal lineage over marital affiliation. Furthermore, her gown is emblazoned entirely with the de Verdun fretty pattern, further cementing her dynastic self-fashioning.

[120] John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester Vol III Part I* (London: 1800). Plate LXXXVII, Fig. 1, opposite p. 651.
[121] Robert Couzin, *Right and Left in Early Christian and Medieval Art*, (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 1-4.

Figure 7. Depiction of Roesia de Verdun's seal from John Nichols The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester *Vol III Part I (London: 1800), p.651, Figure 1. Image credit: Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland, L914.2, Plate LXXXVII, p.651.*

Such heraldic choices diverge from typical conventions at the time. Contemporary noblewomen often displayed their husband's arms in the dominant position, signaling marital alliance. The c. 1254 seal of Agnes de Vescy (born de Ferrers), the same who was later to unleash her wrath on the Priory of Malton as discussed previously, displays the arms of her husband on the dexter shield and the de Ferrers arms on the sinister one. Like Roesia, Agnes also chose to show heraldic patterns on her clothing but again depicts the de Vescy cross patonce prominently on her dress and reserves the de Ferres vair for the inner lining of her mantle.[122] Dervorgilla of Galloway included four heraldic shields on the face of her seal from 1282. As with Agnes de Vescy, the dexter shield depicts her husband's arms while her familial Galloway arms are held in

[122] Peter Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England 1000-1500* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1998), p. 43.

her left. The other two shields are those of the Earls of Chester and Huntingdon, representing her descent from those houses as well.[123] Roesia's exclusion of any reference to either of her husbands or forebears outside of the de Verdon family is consistent with her established legal independence and affirms her deliberate assertion of familial authority.

A third seal which may be attributed to Roesia is recorded in the British Museum's catalog. It depicts a figure, possibly Roesia, kneeling beneath Christ and holding the Grace Dieu charter. [124] This would be symbolic of her foundational role at the convent and her religious devotion. Taken collectively, her seals reflect core themes of piety and patrimony, serving as visual declarations of autonomy and legacy, echoed later in her effigy.

Tomb of Roesia de Verdun

While much of Roesia's life must be reconstructed through legal records, architectural contributions, and urban development, her tomb effigy stands as a deliberate and enduring statement of identity. In a historiographical landscape where the contributions of women are often obscured and fragmented, funerary monuments offer a unique lens through which to assess how women were remembered, how they chose to be represented, and how their authority was inscribed into the physical and devotional fabric of their communities. In a similar way that her personal seals reflected a deliberate assertion of identify, Roesia's tomb effigy iconography offer an even more compelling expression of singularity and warrant focused analysis in this concluding section.

Roesia de Verdun's choice to be buried at Grace Dieu Priory, rather than Croxden Abbey, the traditional resting place of her family, reflects her autonomy and the significance she placed on her own foundation.[125] This divergence from familial tradition underscores her role as religious patron and her desire to assert a distinct identity. Although the exact original placement of her tomb is unknown, her position as foundress and the fact that it served as a site for the

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[123] Wentworth Huyshe, *Dervorgilla, Lady of Galloway, and her Abbey of the Sweet Heart*, (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1913), pp. 1-2.
[124] See entry 3217. Walter de Gray, *Catalog of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, *Vol. 1*, (London: Longman and Co, 1887) p. 571.
[125] Bertram III, Roesia's grandfather, died and was buried in the Holy Land instead of his foundation at Croxden, but his father, Norman, was reinterred at Croxden, as were subsequent heirs before and after Roesia: Nicholas, John, Theobald I and Theobald II. See Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 29.

payment of annual rents strongly suggest it occupied a prominent location within the priory.[126] Burials within churches were not common in the early thirteenth century but were allowed for important ecclesiastical figures or a secular person of importance like a founder or benefactor.[127] Following the Dissolution, the monument was relocated to St. John the Baptist Church in Belton, where it remains. Regardless of the placement, details of Roesia's monument further demonstrate how she was an early adopter, perhaps even a driver, of changing paradigms.

While documentation for effigy commissions during the period is scarce aside from rare royal examples, Roesia's assertive actions during her *femme sole* period imply she may have planned her monument.[128] Her legacy-building through architectural and religious patronage suggests a deliberate vision for her final representation. The effigy likely dates from the earliest stages of English female effigy production in the mid-thirteenth century, positioning Roesia at the forefront of a commemorative movement that offered new visual modes of female identity and agency.[129]

A renewed interest in how women were depicted on their tombs and what it intended to convey has led to a refreshed analysis of medieval women's tombs in recent years. Prior to this, historians had generally analyzed women's tomb in relation to their male counterparts, but recent scholars have argued that tombs should be viewed as more of self-reflection of the women they represented.[130] It is within this context that an analysis of the tomb of Roesia de Verdun belongs.

The fact that Roesia's tomb has survived the centuries when the other de Verdun family tombs have been lost serves as a metaphor for her indomitable spirit. The tombs of most of her de Verdun line have been lost to history. A photograph taken at Croxden in 1911 shows a heavily damaged stone effigy lying on the ground against the west doorway at the opposite end of the church from the altar and cloisters. Aside from being described as "cross-legged" there are no other features described. It is difficult to discern any detail in the photograph, but it appears to be

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[126] Leicestershire, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, *Charter of Agnes, Prioress of Gracedieu, n.d. [13th century], Leices., Staunton Harold*, 26D53/490.
[127] Fredrick Herbert Crossley, *English Church Monuments A.D 1150-1550: An Introduction to the Study of Tombs & Effigies of the Medieval Period* (London: Scribner's sons, 1921), p. 42.
[128] The tomb of King Henry III and his Queen Eleanor are the only known documented commissions from this period. H.A. Tummers *Early Secular Effigies in England: The Thirteenth Century.* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), p.9.
[129] Nigel Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 290.
[130] Diane Heath, 'Tombscape: the tomb of Lady Joan de Mohun in the crypt of Canterbury cathedral', in *Gender in medieval places, spaces and thresholds*, Blud, Heath and Klafter, eds., (London: University of London Press, 2019), pp. 185–202, (p. 186).

mostly torso and part of the legs with the fabric covering the figure draping off to the side. There may have been a very worn shield on one side of the figure, so this was likely an effigy of a de Verdun.[131] Within a few decades even that was gone with no record of its fate when a 1970 survey of the site was completed and cataloged that no effigies remained at the site.[132]

By comparison, most of Roesia's effigy has survived through the centuries. In addition to being a rare surviving memorial of the de Verdun family, Roesia's tomb is only one of two which survive from women who founded medieval religious houses in Britain. The other belongs to Dervorgilla of Galloway, a contemporary of Roesia's whose seal was examined previously.[133] Dervorgilla was born in 1209 to a prominent Anglo-Norman family, and had Scottish royal heritage through her mother Margaret, who was a daughter of Prince David of Scotland. Like Roesia, Dervorgilla was a prominent builder. She founded a Franciscan Friary in Dumfries with her husband in 1262, the Cistercian Sweetheart Abbey in 1275 in memory of her husband, Balliol College at the University of Oxford in 1282, and a Franciscan Friary at Dundee by 1289. Dervorgilla was buried in 1290 at Sweetheart Abbey.[134] Roesia's effigy pre-dates Dervorgilla's by more than forty years, which would make Roesia's the earliest example of a medieval foundress' tomb in Britain.[135]

Crafted in freestone, a commonly used and easily carved medium in the thirteenth century, Roesia's effigy endured centuries of wear and deterioration.[136] The condition of Roesia's tomb was first described at its location in Belton Church in 1622 as "neatly carved and painted", but an etching made in 1800 shows how much the stone had worn down. An 1866 description noted there were only traces of color remaining and the face was "almost gone".[137] Restoration efforts were authorized in 1911, funded by surviving relatives Sir Joseph Verdin and W. H. Verdin (sic), and completed in 1912.[138] A photograph of the effigy prior to this restoration can be seen in Figure 8 with the current appearance as Figure 9. The only other documentation from the

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[131] Charles Lynam, *The Abbey of St. Mary, Croxden, Staffordshire* (London: Sprague & Co. Ltd, 1911), p. 18, Plan 2, Plate 53.
[132] Hagger, *The de Verdun Family*, p. 29. Also 'Houses of Cistercian Monks' by Greenslade and Pugh, pp. 226-230.
[133] Loveday Lewes Gee, *Women, Art, and Patronage from Henry III to Edward III: 1216-1377* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2002), pp. 32-33.
[134] Huyshe, *Dervorgilla,* pp. 3-95.
[135] J.S. Richardson, *Sweetheart Abbey*, ed. by Chris Tabraham (Historic Scotland, 2007), pp 12-13.
[136] Crossley, *English Church Monuments,* p. 25.
[137] Tringham, 'Rose de Verdun', p. 210.
[138] Leicestershire, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, *Faculty to restore the tomb of Roesia de Verdun, 19 October 1911*, DE1965/19.

work is a sketch of the proposed restored monument, but it only captures the sculpture in profile along the dexter side with measurements given for the raised platform the tomb was to be set upon and does not provide much detail into the areas to be replaced.[139] Repairs to the effigy appear to have undergone repairs themselves in some places, further complicating dating and authenticating each detail, but the overall monument is still quite impressive.

[139] Leicestershire, Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, *Faculty to restore the tomb of Roesia de Verdun, 19 October 1911,* DE1965/19.

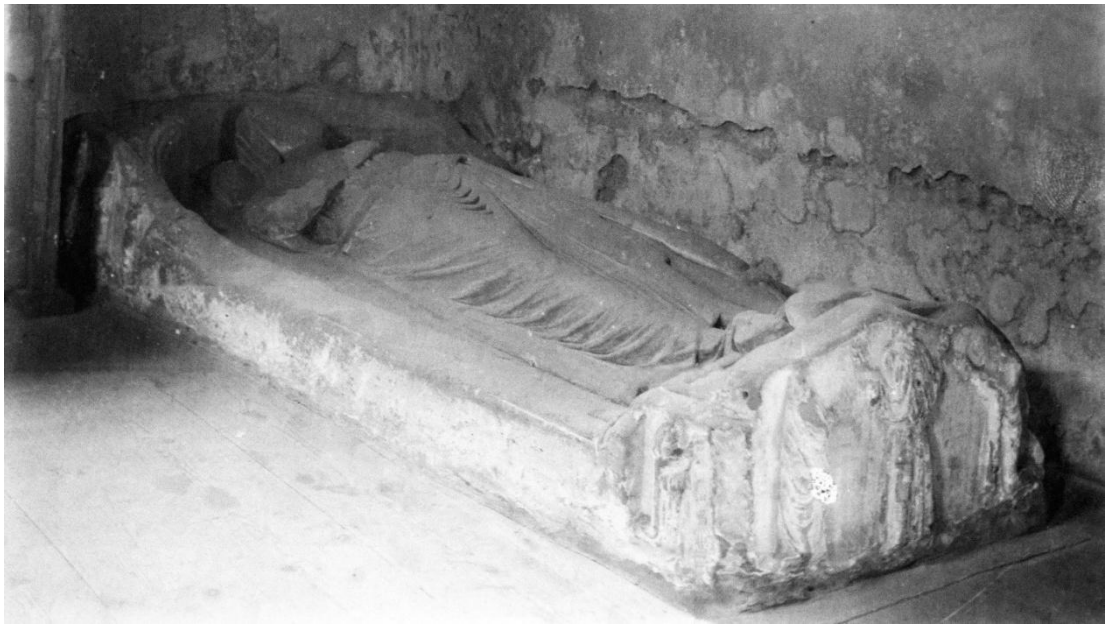

Figure 8. 1907 photograph of Roesia de Verdun's tomb, Belton Church. Image credit: Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, DE3736.

Figure 9. Tomb of Roesia de Verdun in St John the Baptist Church in Belton. Author's photograph, 2022.

Roesia's effigy includes funerary iconography to be discussed which is considered typical for aristocratic women in the medieval period. However, as it will be recalled that female monuments were only beginning to emerge in the thirteenth century, Roesia's tomb may have influenced the iconographic and stylistic developments of subsequent female effigies. In this light, Roesia's monument serves not merely as a reflection of contemporary funerary practices but as a formative example and influencer of symbolic motifs that may have shaped future commemorations of aristocratic women.

The immediate impression the monument evokes is that Roesia was larger than life with an effigy that is six feet in length, made even larger by the surrounding details. Roesia is depicted in a modest gown, girdle, mantle, and pointed shoes, resting beneath a canopy framed by trefoil arches. Her head rests on a cushion, which was customary for the period.[140] Her face is framed by a veil and wimple, traditional headgear that conformed to norms of pious widowhood, though details of the wimple are difficult to see due to restoration around the face.[141]

The effigy is enclosed within a deep canopy flanked by stone columns, featuring decorative spandrels which are especially distinctive. As found in other iconography related to Roesia, the dexter spandrel bears the de Verdun arms surrounded by foliage, which the sinister side depicts a rose framed by scrollwork. This iconographic pairing visually asserts her dynastic identity and individuality. Notably, no reference to either of her husbands are included, reinforcing the impression of self-representation rather than marital association which is found on her personal seals as well.

The effigy and its surrounding architectural and sculptural elements present a compelling assemblage of visual cues, each revealing insights to her status, identity, and the commemorative intent of those involved in its creation. A more detailed assessment will begin at her head, move to her feet, and conclude with an examination of the figures surrounding the monument.

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[140] Brian and Moira Gittos, *Interpreting Medieval Effigies: The Evidence from Yorkshire to 1400*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), p. 8.
[141] Mary Houston, *Medieval Costume in England and France: The 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries,* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996), p.15.

The effigy is framed by a deep canopy which serves to draw the eye to the top of the monument first. Spandrels containing the de Verdun arms on the dexter side and the rose and scroll on the sinister flank Roesia's head. The foliage around the arms are naturally sculpted and more varied than contemporary effigies in that her foliage includes different leaf styles (see

Figure 10. Imagery surrounding Roesia de Verdun effigy. Author's photograph, 2024

Figure 10).

Tummers, in his analysis of more than two hundred thirteenth century secular effigies, describes sculpted leaves early in the century to be carved in a "stiff leaf" style which become more natural towards the end of the century.[142] Leaves carved into tombs later in the century also included different leaf styles on the same monument, compared to a repetitive use of the same stiff leaf on early tombs (see Figure 11). This may indicate Roesia's monument was made in the decades following her 1247 death, but this does not diminish the likelihood that she was involved in dictating the design.

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[142] Tummers found stiff-leaf patterns were often used to decorate the chamfered edges of tomb slabs, see H.A. Tummers, *Secular Effigies,* pp. 34-35. Also see the photo of the double effigy at Winterbourne Bassett for an example of a more naturalistic leaf design from the late thirteenth century. Tummers, *Secular Effigies*, plate 185. Examples of stiff-leaf sculpture in the middle of the thirteenth century versus a more natural foliage from the later part of the century can also be found in Lawrence Stone, *Sculpture in Britain: the Middle Ages,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 94, 106, 110 (plate B).

Figure 11. Examples of foliage style. Left to Right: A "stiff leaf" design c. 1240 carved as a repetitive pattern around the female effigy at Worcester Cathedral. Close-up of Roesia de Verdun tomb foliage showing different plants. Foliage example from female effigy at Chichester Cathedral c. 1290 showing a softer leaf style and multiple types of foliage. Author's photographs, 2024.

The rose carving in the opposite spandrel similarly suggests a stylistic transition toward simplified floral motifs found in the late thirteenth century, consistent with observations by Roper and Stone on stone flowers in medieval ecclesiastical contexts. A sculpture of a rose in the north transept of Westminster Abbey dated to c. 1250, for example, shows more definition in the center of the flower and petals, which are more prominently rounded compared to what is shown on Roesia's tomb.[143] Roper, in her research on stone flowers in medieval churches and cathedrals, noted that roses, while more elaborate initially in the thirteenth century, later gave way to a more simplistic single, or dog-rose, style by the early fourteenth century, which may be more consistent with the rose on Roesia's tomb.[144] This transition could have coincided with the approximate time Roesia's tomb was being made, so the overall design and style of the foliage in the spandrels could represent a later thirteenth century style.

The scroll that surrounds the rose is an interesting and uncommon feature. No information could be found to identify or explain the significance of this, but a scroll could represent that the person was educated or possibly it was meant as a reference to the various grants and charters Roesia bestowed in her life. The only contemporary example of a scroll on an effigy found was that of Lady Fitzalan c. 1300 – 1310 at Bedale, Yorkshire, who was depicted

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[143] Stone, *Sculpture*, plate 91A.
[144] Ida M. Roper, "Flowers in Stone as Applied to the Church Architecture of Bristol", *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 36 (1913), 152-167 (pp. 154-156).

holding a scroll which unrolls down the front of her gown, which was noted as an unusual feature for the medieval period.[145]

There is a possibility that the scroll was influenced by, or a reminder of, Roesia's Norman French heritage. "Speech scrolls" were introduced on French tombs as early as 1325 and were first used merely as a label to identify the individual being commemorated, but later indicated speech, as the name implies.[146] The suggestion of influence from French tombs is speculative due to limited empirical support, but additional features on Roesia's tomb to be discussed are also suggestive of French influence, so the theory may not be implausible.

The rose itself may function as a personal badge, an emblematic device later popularized among aristocratic families to denote affiliation and ownership. Increasingly common from the fourteenth century onward, badges were widely used on furniture, clothing, property and other material goods to clarify ownership and display prominence.[147] The inclusion of a proto-badge emblem would be a unique feature for a woman's tomb in this period. It may have been that the rose and de Verdun arms were added when the tomb was moved from Grace Dieu to Belton in order to make certain the identity of Roesia was not lost. However, the carvings around the outer edge of the effigy to be discussed later are monolithic to the canopy stone, so it is unlikely that the canopy was added later. Perhaps there were earlier carvings which were replaced by the de Verdun arms and rose, but this also appears unlikely given the uniformity of the carvings on this end.

Moving past the canopy section at the head of the effigy, the next striking feature is the inclusion of a book, which the effigy holds with her left arm. While the inclusion of the scroll around the rose could have been a later addition to an original design, the book Roesia holds was not part of the 1911 restoration, so its authenticity is more certain. This is a highly unusual attribute for a memorialized figure of this period, as was mentioned regarding the scroll on the c. 1300 tomb of Lady Fitzalan. Weepers, figures surrounding a tomb praying and mourning for the deceased, often hold prayer books, but no known thirteenth century tomb effigies feature the principal subject holding a book.[148] The fact that this detail was not depicted as an addition

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[145] Stone, *Sculpture*, pp. 152, plate 117B.
[146] Robert Marcoux, 'Breaking the silence of the grave: the agency of speech scrolls on later medieval French tombs', *Early Music*, 48(4) (2021), 465-478, (p. 465).
[147] Saul, *Church Monuments*, p. 166.
[148] Weepers can be seen holding books and scrolls, but no central figures, in Gittos, *Effigies*, pp. 184-6.

during the 1911 restoration and appears as sculpted along with the figure lends credence to its authenticity and original inclusion (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Left: Roesia de Verdun effigy holding a book. Right: Close-up view of the book. Author's photographs, 2024

The book is likely a prayer book, reinforcing Roesia's religious patronage and personal piety, echoing the spiritual themes of her foundations at Grace Dieu and Dundalk. Simultaneously, the book may allude to her administrative competence and adherence to Grossteste's household management principles, particularly in an era when written documentation and estate oversight were hallmarks of noble authority, though rarely associated with women. Books were expensive to produce in this period and generally reserved for nobility as they would have to be copied by hand on parchment and could take several months to complete. The Countess of Artois paid seven livres and eight sous for a book to be copied in 1308 and a few years later paid twenty-five sous for a Book of Hours to be made for her. Later, she also covered the room and board expenses for a scribe for several months to copy yet another book for her. A day laborer in this period would have to work anywhere from one to two weeks to over a year to earn the equivalent of what the Countess paid for her books.[149] Thus, depicting Roesia holding a book was also a statement about her wealth and status.

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[149] Susan Groag Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture', *Signs*, 7(4) (1982), 742-768 (p.747).

At the foot of Roesia de Verdun's effigy lies one of the tomb's most iconographically arresting elements upon which she rests her feet. The inclusion of a footrest for an effigy was a common practice, and most often an animal was selected. A lion was the most common choice for men, particularly for knights, and a dog was the most common animal used for female effigies.[150] Roesia's effigy, however, stands on a wyvern, a mythical creature appearing as a two-legged dragon commonly used in the medieval period as a representation of the devil.[151] Dragons are often found in heraldry, but neither the de Verdun arms or either of Roesia's husbands arms included one, so it was most likely chosen for its religious connotation, particularly as the effigy was to be located in a religious building. The scales which cover the body are quite visible today, as is the detail in the face, though part of the head appears to have been restored given the presence of a seam running through it. There is a ridge down the back of the creature that appear to be folded wings.

Comparative surveys by Tummers and Gittos, cataloging over 350 medieval effigies, reveal that dragon imagery is exceedingly rare. Only sixteen documented examples were found across these works, and all but two effigies were male. Both of the female effigies which included dragons used them as footrests, one from the late thirteenth century on a pair of addorsed dragons often shown in heraldry, and the other c. 1330 in Church Fenton showing the dragon in combat with a lion.[152] Roesia's effigy, excluded from both surveys, raises the total number of documented effigies depicting dragons in England to seventeen and marks only the third female effigy known to include one. Furthermore, it is not only the mere inclusion of the creature on her tomb that is rare, but the style in which it is depicted as well (see Figure 13).

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[150] Tummers, *Secular Effigies,* p. 41. Additional discussion around female effigies having dog footrests is in Phillipa Hardman, 'The "Book of the Duchess" as a Memorial Monument', *The Chaucer Review*, 28(3) (1994), 205-215, (p. 212).

[151] John Vincomb, *Fictitious and Symbolic Creatures in Art with Specific Reference to Their Use in British Heraldry*, (London: Chapman & Hall, 1906), pp. 72, 99, 100.

[152] Tummers, *Secular Effigies*, p. 42 and Brian Gittos and Moira Gittos, *Interpreting Medieval Effigies: The Evidence from Yorkshire to 1400, Appendices*, 2019, https:// https://books.casematepublishers.com/Interpreting_Medieval_Effigies_Online_Appendices.pdf [Accessed 4 July 2025], pp. 3, 36. The style as described in heraldry can be found in Charles Boutell, *English Heraldry*, (London: Gibbings, 1902), p. 100.

Figure 13. Trampled wyvern at the foot of Roesia's effigy. Author's photograph, 2024.

The wyvern on Roesia's effigy is not passively lying on the tomb or fighting another creature but is recoiling under her feet. Its head is clearly visible, twisted outward atop its long neck with its mouth agape, suggesting it may have been trying to bite Roesia or perhaps crying out as her right foot decisively rests on the back of its head for eternity. One leg of the creature is visible, but it is bent and forced into a semi-crouching position, with the talons of the foot widely splayed, conveying the pressure she exerts. Her left foot is firmly planted on the upper section of the creature's tail, though the tail is not resting directly on the ground, implying it is trying to rise up or wriggle out from underneath her, but she has persevered in subduing it and as her left foot also holds down the creature's folded wings, it cannot take flight and escape.

Tummers observed that animals were generally found to lie quietly at the feet of an effigy, regardless of the sex of the person represented, and that examples of animals being trampled or twisting in defense "are rather exceptional" for the period. None of the limited examples he found of animals sculpted in an animated state belonged to women, though the Church Fenton effigy found by the Gittos shows there is one other in existence as it fights the

lion.[153] There is a marked difference, however, between the Church Fenton effigy and Roesia's. The Church Fenton effigy of the lion and dragon is close in sentiment to Roesia's effigy with its 'good versus evil' theme, but on that effigy, the woman is not directly fighting the dragon, it is the lion who is undertaking the action. By comparison, on Roesia's tomb, she is the sole combatant, and conqueror, of the snarling beast. In addition, though her effigy is flanked by carvings of other people yet to be discussed, none of them are engaged with or give any indication that they are connected to the wyvern at her feet.

Furthermore, the male effigies found by Gittos that depict a dragon also show it fighting with a lion or otherwise engaged with a sword, shield, or other weaponry.[154] In contrast, Roesia has overpowered her beast without any armaments other than her own person. The choice of creature and the way it is depicted on Roesia's tomb signifies the spiritual and corporeal resilience she displayed in the face of adversity.

Each of these elements, the canopy imagery, the book she holds, and the wyvern she subdued, contribute materially and symbolically to the construction of Roesia de Verdun's identify, offering visual cues to the aspects of her life she deemed most significant. Her lineage and individuality, her devotional practices and learnedness, and the suggestion of spiritual authority collectively provide insight into her self-representation. In contrast, the final dimension of her tomb, the figures surrounding it, serves as a commentary not on how Roesia saw herself, but on how she was perceived by those who curated her legacy.

Surrounding the head and distal ends of Roesia's effigy are numerous carved figures that offer both visual richness and interpretive complexity. By 1912, the heads of most had been lost, and the subsequent restoration, characterized by distinctively early twentieth century features, raises questions about authenticity. Nonetheless, the surviving garments and bodily designs preserve much of the original aesthetic and suggest a mixture of secular and ecclesiastical

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[153] Tummers, *Secular Effigies,* p. 42.

[154] Knight effigies including a dragon fighting a lion are found at Coverham Abbey, Ingleby Arncliffe, Normanby, and Norton. See Gittos, *Effigies Appendices*, pp. 38, 94, 120, 121. Examples of the dragons on male effigies engaged with a sword or nipping at a shield include those at Acaster Malbis, Bainton, Bedale, York. See Gittos, *Effigies Appendices*, pp. 2, 17, 22, 208. At times, both motifs of the lion fighting one dragon while a weapon was engaged with another were used on the same effigy, as with the knights at Fountains Abbey and Nunnington. Gittos, *Effigies Appendices*, pp. 63, 125. The only example of an ecclesiatical effigy engaged with a dragon has been found at York, where the Archbishop Water de Gray, d. 1225, pierces a dragon with his croizer. Gittos, *Effigies Appendices*, p. 204.

figures. Select individuals will be examined in greater detail; for a comprehensive catalog, see the Appendix.

At the head of the tomb, a central scene depicts a draped figure borne aloft by two winged angels. Although restored to resemble Christ, the iconography more likely was intended to represent Roesia herself, conveyed heavenward in a sheet. A similar depiction found on the mortuary roll of Lucy of Hedingham (c. 1225) similarly depicts Lucy being carried to heaven in a sheet by angels.[155] Flanking this tableau are kneeling, praying figures who encircle the tomb's perimeter and extend downward to the columned base. These figures are rendered in scale hierarchies, slightly smaller than the angels, who are themselves smaller than the central figure, resulting in a visual progression that pulls the gaze upward. This ascending rhythm, accentuated by continuity around the tomb edges, reinforces the interpretation of spiritual elevation and transcendence (see Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 14. Roesia de Verdun's tomb, head end, Author's photograph, 2022.

[155] London, British Library, *Mortuary Roll of Lucy of Hedingham*, c. 1225. Egerton MS 2849. Viewed on display for *Medieval Women in Their Own Words* [Exhibition at the British Library, London], 17 December 2024

Figure 15. Roesia de Verdun tomb, Belton Church. Author's photograph, 2022.

In total, sixteen figures adorn the tomb, two angels and fourteen presumed nuns from Grace Dieu, though the 1912 restoration inaccurately grafted male heads onto several bodies. This ensemble may constitute one of the earliest English instances of "weepers", a funerary motif imported from mid-thirteenth century French tombs, where mourners were depicted praying for the departed.[156] That the figures around Roesia's tomb are uniformly kneeling, many with objects resembling prayer books, substantiates this function. Traditionally, the earliest English examples are given as the tomb chests of Thomas de Cantelupe (1284) at Hereford Cathedral or Joan de Vere (1293) at Chichester Cathedral.[157] Yet, unlike the arcade-framed weepers on the de Vere tomb, Roesia's are unified in composition, variably scaled, and directed inward toward her effigy, producing a communal and immersive scene rather than one oriented toward external spectators. This appears to be another unique feature of Roesia's tomb, as other

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[156] Kathleen Morand, 'Les Pleurants dans l'Art du Moyen Age en Europe' at Dijon, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 113, No. 823 (Oct., 1971), pp. 620-624, p. 623.
[157] Phillipa Hardman, 'The "Book of the Duchess" as a Memorial Monument' in *The Chaucer Review*, Vol 28, No. 3 (1994), pp. 205-215, p. 207. Also referenced by Tummers, *Secular Effigies,* pp. 29-30.

examples of this kind of wrap-around tableau have not been found. The inference of the scenes around Roesia's tomb are of reverence and honor toward the deceased, which is a testament to the impact Roesia de Verdun had on her community (see Figure 16).

Figure 16. Left: Effigy and tomb chest of Joan de Vere, d. 1293, Chichester Cathedral. Right: Close-up view of a weeper on the tomb chest of Joan de Vere, hands clasped in prayer for the departed. Author's photographs, 2024.

A comprehensive evaluation of Roesia de Verdun's effigy against contemporaneous examples is limited by the scarcity of surviving thirteenth century female funerary monuments. Tummers' survey identified fewer than fifty secular female effigies from the period, most dating to its final decades, with Roesia notably absent, so presumedly there are others who remain in obscurity.[158] Of the female effigies Tummers catalogued, only two would have been contemporaries of Roesia, with the possibility of a third. The effigy of Margaret de Say (d. 1230) in Worcester Cathedral and a woman in Romsey Abbey who has been suggested to be Joan de Nevill (d. 1263) date the closest to Roesia. A third female effigy of a woman in Down Ampney may be Margaret de Villiers, which would date the effigy prior to c. 1287 (see Figure 17).[159]

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[158] Tummers *Secular Effigies,* pp. 143-146.

[159] Decisively identifying an effigy is difficult for women of the period, as effigies were often moved and lost their connection to the site or religious institution they had been buried in that could otherwise help identify them. Heraldry is often useful, such as for the effigy of Isabel Brus (d. by 1285), whose dress is adorned with carvings of popinjays from the arms of her husband John Fitz Marmaduke of Horden. See Coss, *The Lady in Medieval England,* pp. 78-79. In the absence of such markers, dating effigies through style, dress, attitude and any other distinguishing features can be an arduous process which continues today, as evidenced by a recent study. Margaret de Say was a

Figure 17. Female effigies of the mid-thirteenth century. Left: Worcester Cathedral, Margaret de Say (d. 1230). Center: Romsey Abbey, possibly Joan de Nevill (c. 1270). Right: All Saints Church, Down Ampney, possibly Margaret de Villiers (d. by 1287, though possibly early fourteenth century). Author's photographs, 2025.

What sets Roesia's monument apart is not merely its scale or symbolism, but its deliberate use of uncommon features such as the animated wyvern footrest, a fully integrated architectural canopy, and the spiritual tableaus that extends beyond the effigy itself. In contrast to the relatively isolated and undecorated monuments from Tummers' study, Roesia's tomb presents a cohesive spatial narrative, with surrounding figures enacting devotional rites. The absence of a

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major benefactor to Worcester cathedral when she died in 1230, and decorative carvings in the Lady Chapel which began construction around this time mirror the stiff-leaf style of her tomb, suggesting they were created around the same time. These details have led recent researchers to believe that the Worchester effigy is that of Margaret de Say. See Vanda Bartoszuk, 'The 'Carnel Chapel Lady' in Worcester Cathedral', *Church Monuments Society*, September 2019, https://churchmonumentssociety.org/monument-of-the-month/the-charnel-chapel-lady-in-worcester-cathedral [Accessed 8 February 2025]. The effigy in Down Ampney was identified as Margaret de Villiers, wife of Nicholas de Villiers who died by 1287, in a 1795 work by Nichols, *Antiquities of the County of Leicester*, p. 189. Tummers does not study the Down Ampney effigy in detail, believing it to be from a later date, so it may not be a contemporary effigy to Roesia's. See Tummers, *Secular Effigies,* p. 23. Nichols identifies the effigy as Margaret due to its proximity to the effigy of Nicholas, her husband. The effigy could be someone else entirely, or if it is Margaret, her effigy could have been made later. Joan de Nevill was a benefactor of Romsey Abbey, supporting the suggestion that the effigy, which dates to her time, was made for her. It was found buried in a place of prominence near the font at the start of the eighteenth century which indicates the woman was a significant benefactor of the site. Henry G. D. Liveing, *Record of Romsey Abbey,* (Winchester: Warren and Sons, 1906), pp. 74-76.

tomb chest or weepers in the other examples further emphasizes the exceptional communal intimacy of Roesia's funerary monument.

Although each of the comparative effigies show distinct stylistic variations in dress, there remains a foundational consistency in attire with long gowns, pointed shoes, and individualized headwear which parallel the iconography employed on the effigy of Roesia. Similarly, each effigy is supported by a single head cushion as found on Roesia's effigy. In two examples, the women hold their garments, a similar gesture to what is portrayed on Roesia's effigy. The Down Ampney effigy presents hands folded in prayer – a common devotional pose among medieval female effigies, conjuring an image of piety, as found on the weeper figures surrounding Roesia's effigy and on the tomb chest of Joan de Vere.

Upon closer examination, distinctions in sculptural detail being to emerge between Roesia's effigy and these comparative examples. Each of the effigies incorporate footrests: the Worchester monument features a decorative ledge, whereas Down Ampney and Romsey Abbey utilize sculpted dogs lying quietly in repose. Notably, none of these monuments exhibit the dynamic imagery found on Roesia's wyvern footrest, further supporting the observation that an animated footrest was an unusual design choice for the period.

Spatial context further distinguishes Roesia's effigy from these monuments, as the effigies at Worchester and Down Ampney are presented without any architectural embellishment and lie unobstructed on all sides. The Romsey Abbey effigy is mostly unobstructed, save for a modest trefoil arch supported by angelic busts above the head. It will be recalled the Roeisa's effigy is completely framed by her canopy and the columns that flank her. Even the footrest on Roesia's tomb is not the final part of the distal end, as it continues with the smaller spiritual narrative around the outside of the framework.

None of these monuments rest atop a tomb chest, at least in their surviving forms. Whether these structures originally incorporated tomb chests, potentially featuring weepers or heraldic adornments as seen on the tomb of Joan de Vere at Chichester, cannot now be determined. What remains for each of the comparative examples appear quite solitary, with no surrounding figures to mourn or escort the soul of the deceased into the afterlife, thereby underscoring the exceptional communal intimacy of Roesia's funerary cortege.

Additional iconographic elements serve to reinforce the anonymity of the comparative examples. The Worcester effigy may be grasping an object in her left hand, but the erosion of the

stone precludes identification. The remaining shape does not suggest a book. The monument at Romsey Abbey does include heraldic shields along the chamfered edge, but they are also so worn as to be undecipherable. Aside from these vestiges, there are no biographical references through inscription, arms, or any identifiable family emblems which has sadly left the women unknown or only recently identified.

By contrast, Roesia's effigy is distinctly personal as the sculpted book, the inclusion of the de Verdun arms, and motifs such as the rose and scroll signify a conscious and deliberate effort to convey her lineage, intellect, wealth, and legacy. Taken collectively, these elements distinguish Roesia's monument as uniquely intentional in its commemoration. As discussed, given the relocation and restoration of her effigy over the centuries, some elements are not original works, but the overall geometry and sculptural integrity of the effigy do not appear to show signs of significant alteration, suggesting that changes over the years complemented rather than disrupted the monument's original design. Even if later in origin, the inclusion of such personalized iconography as the rose, particularly on a female effigy of the mid-thirteenth century, remains exceptional given the lack of evidence to suggest significant alterations to effigy sculptures ever took place across England. Their presence offers a rare degree of biographical specificity that contrasts sharply with the comparative examples which lack inscriptions, identifiable heraldry, or symbolic narrative. In this respect, the motifs on Roesia's effigy contribute meaningfully to its interpretive distinctiveness and affirm its place within the landscape of medieval female memorialization.

The impact of Roesia's effigy extended well beyond its initial commemorative purpose. At Grace Dieu, her tomb served not only as a burial site but also as a locus of feudal and devotional obligation, with tenants required to pay rent there annually.[160] Its relocation to Belton after the Dissolution did not diminish its cultural resonance, instead, it became embedded in local tradition. Oral tradition shared with the author in 2022 revealed that women, particularly those seeking protection during childbirth, visited the site to touch the sculpted girdle of the effigy, suggesting that Roesia's memorial evolved into an object of informal pilgrimage and folk piety. Schulz provides an explanation as to why Roesia's tomb would have been a place for pregnant women to pray for a safe delivery as Grace Dieu was said to be in possession of a relic from the

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[160] Schulz, *Gracedieu & Garendon,* pp. 7-8.

girdle of St. Francis that aided women in childbirth.[161] The story could be linked with another anecdote shared concerning the final resting place of Roesia's bones. According to legend, her bones were to be relocated from Belton in the nineteenth century, but the church vicar decided to bury them in secret and did not reveal where they were hidden, the location now lost. Women coming to pray to Roesia for a safe childbirth would have left a donation to the church during their visit. Consequently, maintaining Roesia's resting place would have had a financial incentive for the church.

The effigy of Roesia de Verdun offers a singular lens through which to understand female representation, commemorative intent, and devotional practice in the thirteenth century. Beyond the individualized symbolism for Roesia herself, the monument distinguishes itself through one of the earliest known English applications of funerary weeper-like figures. Whether the heraldic and symbolic embellishments in the spandrels were original or introduced through later interventions, their inclusion underscores a rare investment in female identify, lineage, and intellect. The effigy's communal framing, physical gestures, and possible devotional role suggest it was more than a funerary monument, it functioned as a locus of memory, social ritual, and localized reverence. Its continued significance, visible in posthumous traditions, folkloric attachments, and anecdotal practices related to childbirth, illustrate how Roesia's legacy evolved following her death. As a material testament to her life, influence, and continued veneration, the effigy invites a reevaluation of gender, agency, and historical remembrance in medieval material legacy.

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[161] Schulz, *Gracedieu & Garendon,* pp. 7-8.

Conclusion

This study has sought to show that figures such as Roesia de Verdun can serve as compelling reminders of the rich insights scholars may uncover about medieval women which have heretofore been overlooked or reduced to isolated anecdotes rather than examined as part of a coherent whole. When considered beyond the confines of folklore and gendered mythmaking, Roesia de Verdun's life reveals a woman of remarkable autonomy, strategic acumen, and enduring influence. Far from the reductive trope of a cunning widow scheming for personal gain, she instead emerges as a skilled landholder who deftly wielded the legal instruments available to her to become, and then thrive as, an early English *femme sole.* Her life offers a compelling reminder of the rich insights scholars may uncover when women's histories are approached not as curiosities, but as coherent, intentional narratives shaped by legal strategy, architectural patronage, and religious reform.

Roesia stands as one of the rare examples of an independent female founder of spiritual, secular, and military institutions in the Middle Ages. She was a protector of her family's future in a landscape defined by a time of male dominance and an early adopter of religious reform, which she demonstrated though her choice of founding a Franciscan Friary and an Augustinian Abbey at a time when these institutions were only beginning to take hold. Roesia's personal seals offer a rare glimpse into her self-representation, combining iconographic individuality with legal authority to assert her identity as a landholder and founder. Their distinctive imagery reinforces her autonomy and the deliberate care she took during her lifetime in curating her legacy. Her tomb, with its early effigy and precursor weeper figures, offers a material legacy that affirmed her status and influence, serving as the earliest known example of an independent medieval abbey foundress' memorial in England.

Her development of Newtown and commissioning of Castleroche in Ireland reflect a deliberate and multifaceted exercise of power and offers a renewed perspective on our understanding of English influence in the country by Anglo-Norman women. Far from being a passive transmitter of royal ambition, Roesia actively shaped colonial landscapes embedding her authority through civic infrastructure and a fortified presence in her overseas lands. Her actions challenge prevailing narratives centered around male agency for Anglo-Norman expansion and invite a reassessment of how gendered power operated across territorial domains in the Marchlands.

The persistence of the defenestration tale demonstrates the impact of narratives that diminish, rather than illuminate, historical accomplishments. Through an examination of archival and legal documents and a review of the material legacy of women from the period, a more nuanced, and far more inspiring, portrait of a thirteenth century woman emerges. Roesia's legacy survives long after the de Verdun name has faded. In reclaiming her story through a holistic biographical lens, this work contributes to the broader discourse on gender, power, and historical memory of women in thirteenth century England. It affirms the necessity of revisiting overlooked lives with scholarly rigor and thoughtful interpretation, and it models how future research might recover the full spectrum of female agency. Roesia and other *femmes sole* of the thirteenth century should emerge not only through moments of conflict, but through their constructive acts of creation, governance, and legacy-building.

Appendix

Appendix Table 1: Roesia de Verdun Chronology

Table 1. Chronology of Events in the Life of Roesia de Verdun

Year	Event
c. 1204	Roesia de Verdun born in Staffordshire, England
by 1222	First marriage: William Perceval de Somery, bore at least 1 child, Nicholas de Somery
1222	Death of first husband, William Perceval de Somery Transfer of Roesia & William's son and heir, Nicholas, to Ranulf III, Earl of Chester
1225	Second marriage: Theobald II Butler
1229	Death of Roesia's son Nicholas de Somery from her first marriage
1230	Death of second husband, Theobald II Butler
1231	Death of father, Nicholas de Verdun Roesia became de Verdun family head *Femme sole* status granted by Henry III
1235	Settlement with Hugh de Lacy to regain de Verdun lands around Dundalk, Ireland
1236	Completed construction of Castleroche in Ireland
1235-41	Grace Dieu Priory at Belton is established for Augustinian nuns
by 1246	Franciscan Friary at Dundalk founded
1247	Roesia de Verdun died on 9 February and was buried at Grace Dieu Priory

Appendix Table 2: Fees Paid by Widows During the Reign of Henry III

Table 2. Widows fees for marriage autonomy, ownership of land, authority over heirs, or a combination thereof in the Fine Rolls of Henry III (1216-1272)[162]

Roll Entry Date (TNA Fine Roll ID)	Petitioner	Fee/Outcome Summary
6 May 1218 (C 60/9)	Sibyl, wife of Roger of Clifford (alive)	References a fine of 800 marks King John appears to have made with Sybil "so that she might marry at her pleasure unless the king ordered otherwise" and it seems that privilege was invoked prior to her marriage to Roger of Clifford.[163]
15 May 1218 (C 60/9)	Cecilia, widow of Roger of Woolbeding	40 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of her husband and the right to "marry whom she pleases except enemies of the king".
30 October 1218 (C 60/11)	Richard, son of Mabel de Clare,	100 marks fine to Mabel's son Richard for marrying without the consent of his mother or the king; it is noted that Mabel had been fined 500 marks by King John for

[162] Compiled from all entries of National Archives, *Henry III Fine Rolls Project*, [Accessed 18-19 January 2025].
[163] See Arthur Thomas Bannister, *The History of Ewias Harold, its Castle, Priory, and Church* (Hereford: Jakeman & Carver, 1902) p. 24.

	widow of Robert Bertram	custody of her husband's land and heir, Richard, upon her husband's death. Mabel is noted as having still owed £152 10s. 3d. on her original fine, so she had paid off a considerable amount of the debt by this time.
25 May 1221 (C 60/15)	Cecilia, widow of Henry de Neville	100s. for license to marry excepting for the king's enemies
[n.d.] November 1221 (C 60/16)	Isabella de Bolbec, countess of Oxford, widow of Robert de Vere	£2228 2s. 9½d. fine of which £1778 11s. are for a debt her husband owed the king, meaning approximately £450 was her personal fine for custody of the land and heir of Robert.
23 November 1221 (C 60/16)	Olenta, widow of Walter de Rodes	40s per year fine for appurtenances of land her deceased husband held of the king, to be held by her as long as it pleases the king.
13 February 1222 (C 60/16)	Rosamund, widow of Phillip de Girunde	20 marks fine "for marrying herself to whomever she will wish".
29 January 1223 (C 60/18)	Isabella, widow of Robert Maudit	20 marks fine for her portion of the inheritance of her father's land; two of Isabella's sisters married without the king's consent after their father died, so their inheritances were remitted to the king.
7 December 1223 (C 60/21)	Agnes, widow of Nicholas le Moyne	10 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of Nicholas.
13 April 1224 (C 60/21)	Cecilia, widow of Walter de St. Rèmy	£10 fine for custody of land and heiresses of Walter.
9 September 1224 (C 60/21)	Beatrice, widow of Ranulf de Carun	80 marks fine for custody of land and heir of Ranulf.
3 May 1226 (C 60/24)	Joan, widow of Rober de Ferrers	Unspecified fee to inherit her deceased mother's land; Joan's sister Matilda is also listed but as her husband is still alive, her inheritance is listed as going to William d'Avranches and Matilda, his wife.
1 February 1227 (C 60/25)	Acilia, widow of Richard of Week	50 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of Richard and to permit her to marry to whomever she wishes.
3 March 1227 (C 60/25)	Alice, widow of Henry de Neville	100 marks fine for license to marry whom she wishes, on condition she will not marry any of the king's enemies and for seisin of her dower; it did not grant her the land of her husband, as that was granted to her husband's sister and heir Isabella, and her (living) husband Robert fitz Maldred.
[n.d.] May 1229 (C 60/28)	Sibyl, widow of John, son of Bernard	5 marks fine for license to marry and inheritance of her father's land which her husband possessed at the time of his death.
15 October 1229 (C 60/28)	Phillippa, Countess of Warwick	100 marks fine to without a husband or marry as she wished as long as the man is faithful to the king
[n.d.] April 1230 (C 60/29)	Cecilia, widow of Hugh Peverel of Sampford	25 marks fine "for marrying herself to whom she will wish except the king's enemies" (no mention of land or heirs)

23 October 1231 (C 60/30)	Roesia de Verdun, daughter of Nicholas, does not mention either husband	700 marks fine for custody of her father's lands as his heir, and that she is not distrained to marry, on condition if she does she will not do so without the will and license of the king
2 December 1231 (C 60/31)	Aleys, widow of Richard of Grimstone	100 marks fine, 20 marks to be paid in the first year and 10 marks per year until the debt was paid, and two palfreys to have custody of the heirs and all lands and tenements of her late husband and for the right to marry again as she wished.
7 October 1232 (C 60/31)	Agnes, widow of William de Meysey	200 marks fine for custody of the land and heir of William.
13 November 1232 (C 60/32)	Matilda de Mowbray, widow of Nigel de Mowbray	300 marks fine so that she "might live without a husband if she wishes or marry whom she pleases" and receive her dower from Nigel.
19 December 1232 (C 60/32)	Nesta, widow of Meredudd Seys	10 marks fine for custody of the land and heir of Meredudd.
27 April 1233 (C 60/32)	Egidia, widow of Simon, son of Richard	40 marks fine for custody of Simon's land and granddaughter Egidia, who was the daughter and heir of William, a son of Simon who was presumedly deceased.
25 September 1233 (C 60/32)	Agnes, widow of William de Meysay, wife of Adam Esturmy	Respite to Adam of a 10 marks payment overdue from an earlier 100 marks fine to Agnes for custody of the land and heir of William, it is unclear when the original fine was given
22 June 1234 (C 60/33)	Christiana, widow of Henry Baybrooke	60 marks fine "for marrying herself to whom she will wish in the king's faith". No mention of land or heirs, but her son Wischard Ledet is listed as a pledge for the fine, so it may have been that the land was already passed on to an heir.
16 July 1234 (C 60/33)	Sibyl, widow of William Hattecrist	5 marks fine for custody of land and heir of William.
20 November 1234 (C 60/34)	Denise, widow of Walter de Langeton	100 marks fine to marry whom she wishes provided he is "of the king's faith"
1 December 1234 (C 60/34)	Eugenia, widow of Henry de Cramaville	Two palfreys to marry whom she wishes provided he is "of the king's faith".
16 May 1235 (C 60/34)	Margaret, widow of Gilbert of Ayton	100s. fine for custody of land and heir of Gilbert.
16 May 1235 (C 60/34)	Katherine, widow of Ralph le Bret	No fine charged but granted custody of land and heir of Ralph.
20 May 1236 (C 60/35)	Joan, widow of Thomas of Barlow	3 marks for custody of land and heirs of Thomas.
15 July 1236 (C 60/35)	Denise, widow of Richard Noel	100s. fine for custody of land and heirs of Richard.

6 February 1237 (E 371/4)	Amice, widow of Gervase Robercy	1 mark fine for custody of land and heir of Gervase.
3 March 1237 (E 371/4)	Alice, widow of Richard of Herriard	5 marks fine for custody of land and heiress of Richard.
22 April 1237 (E 371/4)	Margaret, widow of Henry de la Pomeraie	400 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of Henry, as well as responsibility to pay the debt Henry owed the king.
9 May 1241 (C 60/37)	Ada, widow of John, son of Robert	2000 marks for custody of land and heirs of John.
23 August 1241 (C 60/37)	Margery, widow of Robert le Grosvenor	22 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of Robert.
24 December 1241 (C 60/38)	Joan, widow of Hugh Wake	10,000 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of Hugh.
2 January 1242 (C 60/38)	Alice, widow of Roger de Clare	200 marks for custody of land and heirs of Roger.
30 April 1242 (C 60/38)	Imenia, widow of Ralph of Southleigh	1,000 marks fine for custody of the lands and heirs of Ralph and that "she might marry herself to whom she will wish".
20 July 1242 (C 60/39A)	Alice, widow of Roger Hunter	2 marks fine for the custody of the land and heirs of Roger "and for marrying herself to whom she will wish".
3 September 1242 (C 60/39A)	Beatrice, widow of Peter Baldwin	100s. for custody of land and heirs of Peter.
16 Nov. 1242 (C 60/40)	Alice, widow of Hugh de Hodeng	£60 for custody of the land of Hugh.
13 January 1243 (C 60/40)	Isabella d'Aubigy, no husband listed	60 marks fine for "marrying herself to whomever she will wish".
18 February 1243 (C 60/40)	Matilda, widow of John Bishop	50 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of John.
[n.d.] Feb. 1244 (C 60/41)	Alice, widow of Robert le Archer	15 marks for custody of land and heirs of Robert and to marry whom she wishes
15 February 1244 (C 60/41)	Matilda, widow of John le Mire	60 marks fine for custody of land and heir of John.
[n.d.] Nov.? 1245 (C 60/42)	Mabel, widow of Peter de Scotney	60 marks fine to marry herself to whomever she will wish. The entry was canceled in a subsequent entry when Isenbard de Fontibus gave the king 60 marks to marry Mabel.
29 March 1246 (C 60/43)	Isabella, widow of Henry de Percy	20 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of Henry.
[n.d.] Oct. 1247 (C 60/44)	Joan, widow of Reginald de Vautorte	£100 to marry herself to whomever she will wish.
13 April 1248 (C 60/45)	Joan, widow of William of Woodham	£20 fine for custody of land and heir of William.

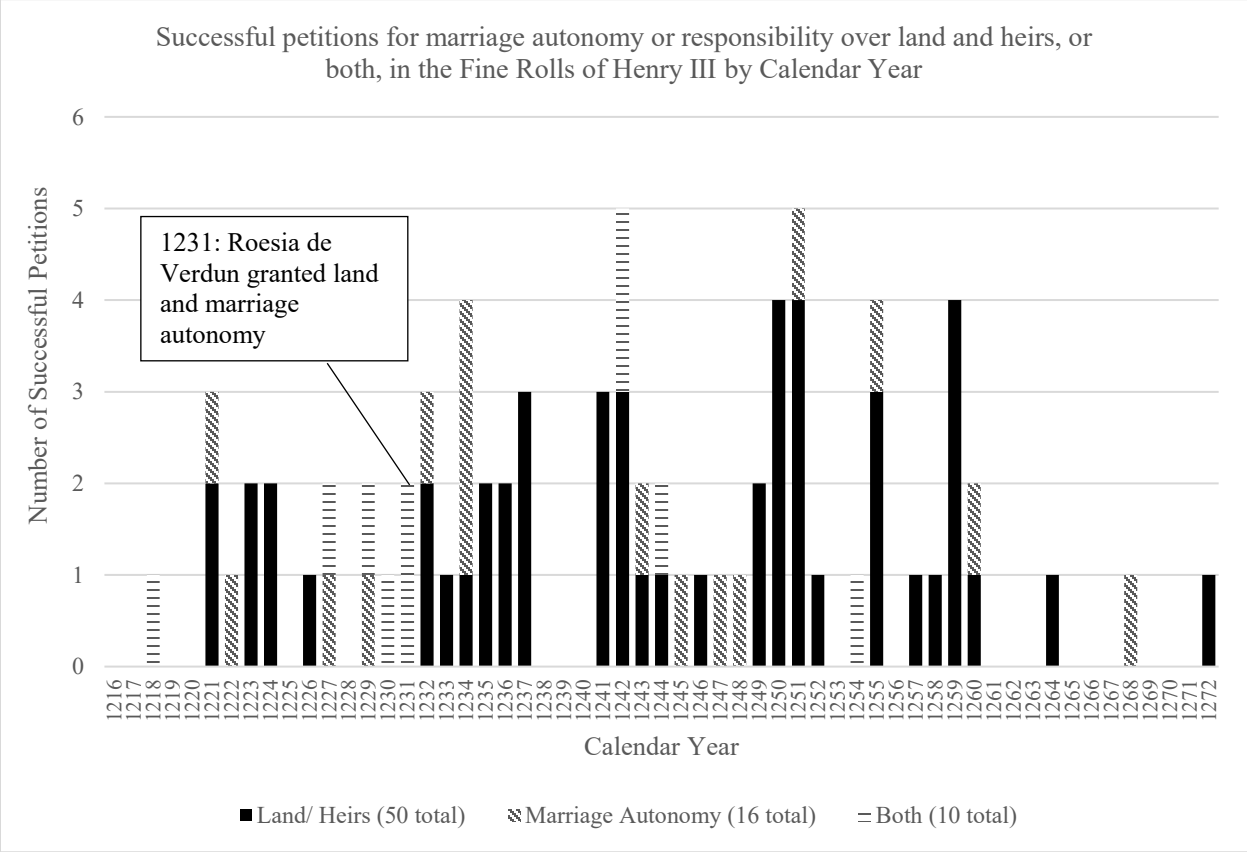
1 May 1248 (C 60/45)	Eva, widow of Geoffrey Crossbowman	100s. fine for license to marry whomever she will wish.
28 August 1248 (C 60/45)	Joan, wife of William Walensis	Payment terms for William, who assumed responsibility of a previous fine of £100 given to Joan for license to marry whomever she had wished, there is no mention of a previous husband so it is unclear if Joan was a widow when she married William; could she have been the wife of Reginald de Vautorte – the fine is the same.
17 April 1249 (C 60/46)	Amice, countess of the Isle of Wight, widow of B. earl of the Isle	£400 fee per year for custody of the land and heir of the earl, "on condition that Amice shall not permit herself to be married" until the lawful age of her son. If she were to marry without the king's consent, the land would revert to the king's possession.
10 November 1249 (C 60/46)	Alice, widow of Thomas Brien	50 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of Thomas.
3 January 1250 (C 60/46)	Beyla, widow of Abraham, Jew of Norwich	£20 fine for chattels, land and rents of Abraham.
15 March 1250 (C 60/46)	Emma, widow of Walter Devensh	100s. fine for custody of land and heirs of Walter.
24 May 1250 (C 60/47)	Mabel, widow of Richard of Anstey	300 marks fine for custody of the land and heirs of Richard.
24 October 1250 (C 60/47)	Mabel, widow of William le Daneys	£8 19s. 8d. annually for ownership of the manor previously held by William and custody of his heir.
10 May 1251 (C 60/48)	Rametta, widow of Everard Teutonicus	100 marks fine "for marrying herself to whomever she will wish".
6 June 1251 (C 60/48)	Agnes, widow of William de Wellesley	£10 for custody of land and heirs of William.
29 June 1251 (C 60/48)	Emma, widow of Geoffrey Despenser	400 marks fine for custody of land and heir of Geoffrey.
8 August 1251 (C 60/48)	Joan, widow of Paulinus Peyvre	500 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of P. On 24 October of the same year in the same Fine Roll, John de Grey is fined 500 marks for marrying Joan without the king's permission. On 9 April 1252, both Joan and John are given an extension of the deadline they had missed to pay their respective fines (Fine Roll C 60/49).
26 August 1251 (C 60/48)	Isabella, widow of John Fletcher	20 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of John.
17 October 1252 (C 60/49)	Anabilla, widow of Robert Pakeman	4 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of Robert.
[n.d.] May? 1254 (C 60/51)	Elena, widow of Robert of Greystoke	£20 to marry herself to whom she will wish and custody of the land of Robert. (witnessed by Queen Eleanor)

11 January 1255 (C 60/52)	Alice, widow of James de Estwode	5 marks fine for customer of land and heirs of James.
[n.d.] April 1255 (C 60/52)	Isabella, widow of Ralph de Haya	200 marks fine to marry herself to whomever she wishes.
[n.d.] July 1255 (C 60/53)	Alice, widow of Thomas Breyen	Defined payment terms for remaining 10 marks of a 50 marks fine previously assigned for custody of the land and heir of Thomas (original fine not found in the rolls)
1 September 1255 (C 60/53)	Juliana, widow of Henry de Berneval	50 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of Henry.
26 October 1257 (C 60/54)	Joan, widow of Roger of Huntingfield	100 marks fine for custody of land and heir of Roger.
25 July 1258 (C 60/55)	Marsilia, widow of William the Butler	30 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of William.
[n.d.] February 1259 (C 60/56)	Hawise, widow of Patrick de Chaworth	100 marks fine for custody of land and heirs of Patrick "for the year next"; possibly Hawise was only granted ownership temporarily. In July 1259, Hawise was fined 1000 marks for custody of the land and heirs of Patrick, so this seems to have made the arrangement permanent but there is no mention of the earlier fine. On 17 June 1261, Hawise is noted as not having paid the installments of the fine for that year but offering her "special grace for the war that she wages in the parts of Wales" Henry adjusted her payment terms. He gave another respite under the same special grace on 20 October of the same year. It was noted that Hawise's payments were designated "towards the works of Westminster". See Fine Roll C 60/58, entries 628 and 1040.
1 August 1259 (C 60/56)	Elena, widow of Andrew Blund	200 marks for custody of land and heirs of Andrew.
2 August 1259 (C 60/56)	Galiena, widow of Ralph de Normanville	A fine of 300 marks for custody of land and heirs of Ralph to be paid to William Bonquor in lieu of land the king had granted him.
[n.d.] October 1259 (C 60/56)	Margery, widow of John of Gatesden	60 marks fine for custody of the land of John; the fine was given to both Margery and a Richard of Gatesden, though her relationship to Richard is not explained (perhaps her brother-in-law?).
28 May 1260 (C 60/57)	Margery, widow of John of Gatesden (above)	5 marks fine to marry whom she wished
[n.d.] Dec 1260 (C 60/58)	Joan, widow of William de Beauchamp	100s. per year fine for custody of land and heir of William. There is no set fine, so presumedly this payment would continue until the heir is married, which the king retained the rights to arrange as part of this agreement.
23 November 1261 (C 60/59)	Belia, widow of Peitevin of Bedford, Jew	Terms set for what remained of an earlier fine of 735m. 5s. 5d. Henry had previously given her at an unspecified date for custody of the land and chattels of Peitevin.

20 October 1264 (E 371/28)	Alice, widow of Ralph de Throp'	£100 fine for custody of land and heirs of Ralph.
[n.d.] July 1268 (C 60/65)	Beatrice, widow of Thomas of Hengrove	Half a mark of gold for license to marry whom she wishes.
23 October 1272 (C 60/69)	Mary, widow of Thomas of Beckering	No fine given but assignment of the land of her former husband and also her deceased father, James de Cauz, in return for her homage and guarantee to pay future taxes. Thomas had been granted the land of James de Caux [sic] on 14 May 1248 through the inheritance of his wife Mary, for a payment of £7 10s., see Fine Roll C 60/45, entry 352, so it would see Henry did not require an additional payment for the land to revert to Mary in 1272.

Appendix Chart 1: Analysis of Widows Fees in the Fine Rolls of Henry III (1216-1272)

Chart 1. Analysis of widows' fees for marriage autonomy and responsibility over land and heirs, or both, in the Fine Rolls of Henry III (1216-1272)[164]



[164] Data compiled in Table 2 plotted for deeper analysis.

Appendix Table 3: Medieval Religious Houses Founded by Women in England

Table 3. English Nunneries (Abbies & Priories) Founded or Co-Founded by Women in the Middle Ages[165]

Order	Foundress (House, date)	Total
Benedictine	Queen Ealhswith (Winchester, c. 900) Queen Elfreda (Wherwell, c. 986) Judith de Lens, Countess of Huntingdon (Elstow, late 11c.) Ivetta de Arches (Nunmonkton, late 11c.)[2] Emma de Arras, Countess of Guisnes (Redlingfield, 1120)[2] Edith Launcelene (Godstow, c. 1133) Murial de Scales (Blackborough, c. 1150)[2] Agnes de Arches (Nunkeeling, 1152) Gundred de Glanville (Bungay, c. 1160)[2] Helewise de Clere (Yedingham, before 1163) Edith, daughter of Water the Deacon (Wix, 12c.)[4] Burga Pantulf (Langley, mid 12 c.)[2] Eustacia de Saye (Westwood, late 12c.)[3] Lucy de Vere (Hedingham Castle, before 1191)[2]	14 *(6 by women alone)*
Cistercian	Lucy, Countess of Perche (Stixwould, late 11c.) Alice St. Quintin (Nunappleton, c. 1150) Avice de Tany (Hampole, c. 1170) Christine Holte (Wintney, 12 c.)[2] Isabel, Countess of Warwick (Cokehill, late 12c.) Isabel de Albini (Marham, 1249)	6 *(5 by women alone)*
Augustinian	Eva Fitzharding (Bristol, c. 1173) Ela Longspee, Countess of Salisbury (Lacock, 1232) **Roesia de Verdun (Grace Dieu, c. 1239)** Margery de Crek (Flixton, 1258) Margery de Lacy (Aconbury, 1284)[1] Matilda de Clare, Countess of Gloucester and Hertford (Canonsleigh, 1284)[1]	6 *(4 by women alone)*
Franciscan	Mary de Valence, Countess of Pembroke (Denny, 1342)	1
Premonstratensian	Agnes de Camville (Brodholme, c. 1150)	1
Cluniac	None[5]	0
Brigittine	None[5]	0

[1] *Founded on an existing site not originally founded by a woman*
[2] *Co-founded with her husband*
[3] *Co-founded with her son*
[4] *Co-founded with brother and another man*
[5] *English nunneries of this order existed (2 Cluniac & 1 Brigittine), but none were founded/co-founded by a woman*

Appendix Figure 1: Weeper-type Figures Found on the Tomb of Roesia de Verdun, Belton

Sixteen figures surround Roesia's tomb in total: 5 at the head end, 3 at the distal end, 3 along each side of the head end, and 1 each along the side of the distal end.

Appendix Figure 1.1 Roesia de Verdon's tomb, dexter side near head, Author's photograph, 2022.

Appendix Figure 1.2 Roesia de Verdon's tomb, sinister side near head, Author's photograph, 2022.

[165] Compiled from source data in Eileen Power *Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. 685–692.

Appendix Figure 1.3 Roesia de Verdon's tomb, distal end, Author's photograph, 2022.

Appendix Figure 1.4 Roesia de Verdon's tomb, Left: distal end, dexter side. Right: distal end, sinister side. Author's photograph, 2022.

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