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# The Role of Lesser Aristocratic Women in Twelfth-century Yorkshire Society - The Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin charters\*

Hanna Kilpi (University of Glasgow)

The role of aristocratic women in their local and regional societies and networks in twelfth-century England has been explored largely through research into comital and royal women. Lesser aristocratic women, variously categorised as ‘non-comital’, ‘honorial’, ‘knightly’, or ‘baronial’, have been incorporated within other elite women’s studies and their experience considered comparable.<sup>1</sup> For this paper lesser aristocracy are defined as

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<sup>1</sup> Susan M. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester, 2003), p. 161; RáGena C. DeAragon, ‘Wife, Widow, and Mother: Some Comparisons Between Eleanor of Aquitaine and Noblewomen of the Anglo-Norman and Angevin World’, in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York, 2003), pp. 97–113; Eleanor Searle, ‘Women and the Legitimation of Succession at the Norman Conquest’, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, III (1980) [hereafter *ANS*], pp. 159–70, 226–29; Judith A. Green, ‘Aristocratic Women in Early Twelfth-Century England’, in *Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Proceedings of the Borchard Conference on Anglo-Norman History*, ed. Warren C. Hollister (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 59–82; Philadelphia Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows in Medieval Iceland and Yorkshire: Property, Power, Marriage and Identity in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 2010); Matthew Hammond, ‘Women and the Adoption of Charters in Scotland North of Forth, c.1150-1286’, *The Innes Review*, LXII (2011), pp. 5–46.

landholding women below comital rank. These women did not have aristocratic titles through birth and their families were likely to have gained wealth and status through military or office. Families in this category were often involved in knight service, military tenure, and religious patronage. For the thirteenth century Louise Wilkinson's work on Lincolnshire women and Emma Cavell's on the Welsh Marches have illustrated the wealth of extant material and its potential for identifying key differences between aristocratic statuses in order to discuss women of baronial and non-comital levels.<sup>2</sup> Wilkinson and Cavell's work provides a strong frame of reference for a more comprehensive and detailed understanding of the place lesser aristocratic women had in twelfth-century local society and their families. The survival of sufficient source material is a challenge for the study of twelfth-century women, and there has been an assumption that it is very limited.<sup>3</sup> Women of this social group occur rarely in chronicle material, but they can be found in charters. A lack of sequential charters, however, has been identified as the main reason for the limited scholarly work on women of the lesser aristocracy.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, for France and Scotland, approaching women through charters has

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<sup>2</sup> Louise J. Wilkinson, *Women in Thirteenth-Century Lincolnshire* (Woodbridge, 2007); Emma Cavell, 'Aristocratic Widows and the Medieval Welsh Frontier: The Shropshire Evidence', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> Ser., XVII (2007), pp. 57-82.

<sup>3</sup> Johns, *Noblewomen*, pp. 152-61, esp. pp. 153, 161.

<sup>4</sup> Two often mentioned twelfth-century women are Lady Constance Fitz Gilbert, Geoffrei Gaimar's patron, and Nicholaa de la Haye, heiress of Brattleby and castellan of Lincoln. Johns, *Noblewomen*, pp. 152-61; Ian Short, 'Patrons and Polyglots: French Literature in Twelfth-Century England', *ANS*, XIV (1991), pp. 229-49, esp. pp. 236-37; Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis: History of the English*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford, 2009), pp. xi and ch. 11, lines 6432-58, pp. 348-49; Richard de Devizes, *Cronicon Richardi Divisensis de Tempore Regis Richardi Primi*, ed. and trans. John T. Appleby (London, 1963), pp. 30-1; Louise J. Wilkinson, 'Women and Sheriffs in Early Thirteenth Century England', in *English Government in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Adrian Jobson (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 111-24, esp. pp. 111-18; Wilkinson, *Women in Thirteenth-Century Lincolnshire*, pp. 13-25.

been pursued effectively and suggests that more potential is present in twelfth-century material than is recognised.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, if we are to understand women's roles, it is best done through charter material. The survival of significant numbers of aristocratic charters from twelfth-century Yorkshire means that, for this area, focus can be shifted to lesser aristocratic women. By analysing families and individuals of lesser aristocratic women as case studies, this paper will be able to address the lack of charters for single individuals and the need for more sequential charters to develop an image of lesser aristocratic women's actions in the county.

This article seeks to demonstrate that lesser aristocratic women were significant social agents and shaped the world around them by examining the charter occurrences of the Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin families in twelfth-century Yorkshire. Limitations resulting from source survival are not insurmountable and by casting a wide net over the extant material to pull out case studies, such as these, it is possible to explore twelfth-century aristocratic women's experiences. Although significant amounts of evidence for any single individual might be scattered, careful analysis of large numbers of charters and cartularies can identify wider patterns among lesser aristocracy which can then be applied to individuals and families with fewer or non-sequential sources. The women in these three lesser aristocratic families appear in 51 charters, and illustrate how they were involved in public and private societies that were appropriate to their social status and wealth. These social connections have further implications for our understanding of women's involvement in Yorkshire's physical and social landscapes. This paper will begin with an overview of the

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<sup>5</sup> Amy Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin: Aristocratic Family Life in the Lands of the Loire, 1000-1200* (Ithaca, 2010); Kimberly A. LoPrete, 'The Domain of Lordly Women in France, ca. 1050-1250', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, XLIV (2008), pp. 13-35; Theodore Evergates, 'Aristocratic Women in the County of Champagne', in *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia, 1999), pp. 74-110; Hammond, 'Women and the Adoption of Charters', pp. 5-46.

women to contextualise their families and marriages. The second half will then consider what these charters can tell us about women as monastic founders and patrons and about their secular networks and place in lay society.

The contemporary function of charters as records of exchanges allows charters to be used as sources for women's social relationships and networks. The content of a charter tells us about what was exchanged, perhaps why, what terms were set, and who were involved. As well as accounting for legal details of an exchange, charters were products of a negotiation process and thus they have an intrinsic role as records of people and relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Traditional charter scholarship, or charter diplomatic, is the study of developments in the use of specific terms and phrases, and has been of immense value to charting the progress of legal concepts and their application, for example in the use of terms of donation and the expected duties of the donor towards the beneficiary.<sup>7</sup> More recently, charters have also been integral to exploring aristocratic networks and relationships.<sup>8</sup> These relationships could be numerous -

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<sup>6</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2013), pp. 87-89; Matthew Hammond, 'Assemblies and the Writing of Administrative Documents in the Central Medieval Kingdom of the Scots', in *Medieval Legal Process: Physical, Spoken and Written Performance in the Middle Ages*, ed. Marco Mostert and P. S. Barnwell (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 123-46.

<sup>7</sup> David A. Postles, 'Seeking the Language of Warranty of Land in Twelfth-Century England', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, XX (1999), pp. 209-22; John Hudson, *Land, Law and Lordship in Anglo-Norman England* (Oxford, 1997); John Hudson, *The Formation of the English Common Law: Law and Society in England from the Norman Conquest to Magna Carta* (1996); John Hudson, 'Legal Aspects of Scottish Charter Diplomatic in the Twelfth Century: A Comparative Approach', *ANS*, XXV (2003), pp. 121-38, Paul R. Hyams, 'Warranty and Good Lordship in Twelfth Century England', *Law and History Review*, V (1987), pp. 437-503; Paul R. Hyams, 'The Charter as a Source for the Early Common Law', *The Journal of Legal History*, XII (1991), pp. 173-89.

<sup>8</sup> Stephanie L. Mooers, 'Patronage in the Pipe Roll of 1130', *Speculum*, LIX (1984), pp. 282-307; David A. Postles, 'Choosing Witnesses in Twelfth Century England', *The Irish Jurist*, XXIII (1988), pp. 330-46; J. C. Russell, 'Attestation of Charters in the Reign of John', *Speculum*, XV (1940), 480-98;

from grantors and beneficiaries to those who gave consent or witnessed - and as charters recorded the parties involved they created an archive of names and connections.<sup>9</sup> Studies of twelfth-century English networks have thus illustrated how medieval society's networks and relationships in and outwith royal courts and masculine networks can be contextualised through charters and their language. There is therefore enormous potential to explore lesser aristocratic women's social networks through similar methods. This article will use extant charter material from the three Yorkshire families – the Rumilly, the Arches, and the St Quentin – to demonstrate women as active landholders and agents in social networks and relationships in twelfth-century Yorkshire.

The Rumilly family were the honorial lords of Skipton in the West Riding of Yorkshire and provide six of the women examined in this study, two of whom stand out as main case studies. Overall 36 twelfth-century charters can be identified as being issued with the Rumilly women's involvement as sole issuer, co-issuer, or giving consent. Of these, 26 were issued by

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Anne Polden, 'The Social Networks of the Buckinghamshire Gentry in the Thirteenth Century', *Journal of Medieval History*, xxxii (2006), pp. 371–94; K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, 'The Making of Henry of Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, LIV (1989), pp. 287–310; Michael Grünbart, 'Tis Love That Has Warm'd Us: Reconstructing Networks in Twelfth Century Byzantium', *Revue Belge de Philologie et D'histoire*, LXXXIII (2005), pp. 301–13; Dauvit Broun, 'The Presence of Witnesses and the Making of Charters', in *The Reality Behind Charter Diplomacy in Anglo-Norman Britain*, ed. Dauvit Broun (Glasgow, 2011), pp. 235–87.

<sup>9</sup> K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, *Domesday Descendants: A Prosopography of Persons Occurring in English Documents 1066-1166: Pipe Rolls to Cartae Baronum*, 2 vols (Woodbridge, 2002), [hereafter *Domesday Descendants*]; Amanda Beam, John Bradley, Dauvit Broun, John Reuben Davies, Matthew Hammond, Michele Pasin with David Carpenter, Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh and Keith J. Stringer, and the assistance of Susan Bell, Kathryn Dutton, Nicholas Evans, Beth Hartland, Fergus Oakes and Andrew Smith, *The People of Medieval Scotland, 1093-1314* (Glasgow and London, 2012): [www.poms.ac.uk](http://www.poms.ac.uk).

the women, with 21 issued by them independently as sole issuer.<sup>10</sup> In the early twelfth century the honour passed to Cecily I de Rumilly (d. c.1154-5), first of the main case studies, from her father Robert.<sup>11</sup> The date of Cecily I's first marriage is not known, but her first husband, William Meschin lord of Copeland in Cumbria, died c.1135. Soon after her first widowhood in the late 1130s, she married Henry de Tracy, lord of Barnstable, who outlived her.<sup>12</sup> Cecily I's five children, two sons and three daughters, were all from her marriage to William. Cecily and William's sons, who had no progeny of their own, predeceased their parents and consequently Cecily I and William's three daughters - Avice, Alice I, and Maud – inherited their parents' lands in Copeland and Skipton.<sup>13</sup> Philadelphia Ricketts has argued that the three-way partition was made in such a way that Alice I, who is the second main case study from the Rumilly family, received most of the Skipton inheritance while Avice and Maud primarily received their parents' Cumbrian lands.<sup>14</sup> A reason for this division could be their marriages and subsequent proximity to Skipton. Avice's first marriage was to William II

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<sup>10</sup> Cecily I de Rumilly issued *Early Yorkshire Charters*, ed. William Farrer and Charles Clay, 12 vols (1914–65) [hereafter *EYC*], VII, no. 1861; *EYC*, VII, nos. 2, 4-7, 9-11. Avice de Rumilly issued *EYC*, III, nos. 1862, 1864; *EYC*, VI, nos. 33, 62, 66, 73; and witnessed *EYC*, III, no. 1861. Alice I de Rumilly issued *EYC*, VII, nos. 13-18, 21-23, 25, 26, 28-30, 44; and she witnessed *EYC*, VII, nos. 88, 112, 129. Alice II de Rumilly issued *EYC*, VII, no. 32; and witnessed *EYC*, VII, nos. 88, 112. Cecily II de Rumilly issued *EYC*, VII, no. 31. Hawise de Rumilly issued *EYC*, VII, no. 45.

<sup>11</sup> *EYC*, VII, 4; *Domesday Descendants*, II, 674-75. The exact date of Robert's death is unknown, but it seems to have occurred by 1120.

<sup>12</sup> *EYC*, VII, 3-6, nos. 2, 3, 10, 11; *Domesday Descendants*, II, 674-75, 743, 1039.

<sup>13</sup> Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, pp. 109-13. Alice's charters only grant or confirm lands in Skipton and do not suggest that she was significantly active outside these lands. *EYC*, VII, nos. 18, 21-23, 25, 26, 28-30. She issued three with consent recorded by *laudatio parentum*: *EYC*, VII, nos. 13, 16, 17. She was co-issuer in another three *EYC*, VII, nos. 14, 15, 44. Alice also witnessed in three charters *EYC*, VII, nos. 88, 112, 129.

de Curcy (d. c.1125-30) who inherited lands in Stogursey, Somerset and also held an interest in Nuneham, Oxfordshire.<sup>15</sup> Her second marriage, after 1125-30, was to William Paynel of Drax, a branch of the Paynell family that settled in Yorkshire, and whose estates were a significant distance from Skipton.<sup>16</sup> Alice's third and final marriage took place c.1153 and was to Walter de Percy, whose lands lay on the Yorkshire coast and, again, not near Skipton.<sup>17</sup> Maud, the third daughter, married Shropshire and Herefordshire based landholders Philip de Belmeis and Hugh de Mortimer.<sup>18</sup> Unlike her sisters, Alice I stayed in Skipton throughout her marriages. Alice I's first marriage, c.1135-37, was to William Fitz Duncan until his death c.1152-54. After a brief widowhood, Alice married Alexander Fitz Gerald in 1155-56 until her death before Michaelmas in 1187.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Domesday Descendants*, II, 428; *Two Cartularies of Abingdon Abbey*, ed. Gabrielle Lambrick and C. F. Slade, 2 vols (Oxford, 1992), II, no. 112; *Domesday Book*, ed. Ann Williams and G. H. Martin (London, 1992), pp. 266, 436; *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, ed. Hubert Hall, 3 vols (London, 1896) [hereafter *Red Book*], I, 224-5; *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, ed. H. A. Cronne and R. H. C. Davis, 3 vols (Oxford, 1968), III, no. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Avice's charter activity, for example, can be placed to the Paynell fee after her marriage to William Paynel: *EYC*, VII, 7. William, son of Domesday tenant Ralph Paynel who came to England after the conquest, held lands in Yorkshire (Drax), Lincolnshire (Middle Rasen), and Normandy (Les Moutiers-Hubert and Hambye); *EYC*, VI, 5. Avice issued five charters alone: *EYC*, III, no. 1862; *EYC*, VI, nos. 33, 62, 66, 73; one with a *laudatio parentum* clause: *EYC*, III, no. 1863; and witnessed one charter: *EYC*, III, no. 1861

<sup>17</sup> *EYC*, II, no. 1202; *EYC*, VI, no. 48; *EYC*, XI, no. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Maud was active in Shropshire and Herefordshire and can be found as 'domina Matilda filia Willelmi Meschin uxor praedicti Philippi de Belmis' in the foundation charter of Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire, dated to c.1143-44; *The Cartulary of Lilleshall Abbey*, ed. Una Rees (Shropshire, 1997), no. 18. Also see: *EYC*, VII, 8-9; Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, pp. 107, 124; Max Lieberman, *The Medieval March of Wales: The Creation and Perception of a Frontier, 1066-1283* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 75, 84-85.

<sup>19</sup> Steve Flanders argues for a different order of marriages for Alice, placing William Paynel first and William II de Courcy second. Flanders incorrectly names Alice's third husband as Henry de Tracy,



The next Rumilly generation followed a similar pattern. Alice I de Rumilly and William Fitz Duncan's son and only male heir, William of Egremont, predeceased his parents c.1163 with no male issue of his own. This led to the partitioning of inheritance between the couple's three daughters - Cecily II, Amabel, and Alice II.<sup>20</sup> By the third quarter of the twelfth century, the Rumilly family's role in Skipton had been affected by the fragmentation of the honorial estate, the heiresses, and their marriages. As heiresses the women had married well and the family benefited from this. Alice I's two marriages created connections to Scottish and English royal courts which, combined with her status as the main heiress of the Honour, likely helped her daughters.<sup>21</sup> One daughter, Cecily II (d. 1188-90), entered into the comital aristocracy through her husband William le Gros, earl of Aumale (d. 1179).<sup>22</sup> The next daughter, Alice II (d. 1215) married first Gilbert Pipard, sheriff of Gloucester and Hereford, and after his death c.1192 she married Robert de Courtenay, lord of Sutton

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who was in fact Cecily I de Rumilly's second husband. Steve Flanders, *De Courcy: Anglo-Normans in Ireland, England and France in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, (Dublin, 2008), p. 115; *EYC*, VII, nos. 10, 11.

<sup>20</sup> *EYC*, VII, 14-20, 38-49; Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, p. 113; *The Register of the Priory of St. Bees*, ed. James Wilson (London, 1915), pp. 494-96.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Vincent, 'Warin and Henry Fitz Gerald, the King's Chamberlains: The Origins of the Fitzgeralds Revisited', *ANS*, XXI (1999) pp. 233-60, esp. pp. 234, 238; Flanders, *De Courcy*, pp. 117-119; *EYC*, VII, 10, nos. 14, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Cecily II's and William's marriage was most certainly after 1157 as discussed by Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, p. 108. Flanders suggests the marriage took place soon after the battle of the Standard in 1138. Flanders, *De Courcy*, pp. 117-22. This is unlikely as Cecily II's parents' marriage took place in the 1130s. References to William le Gros' wife in 1138 or in Henry of Huntingdon's account of the Battle of Lincoln in 1140, are unlikely to be Cecily. These are either inaccurate or refer to an earlier marriage. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of The English People*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: 1996), book x, chapter 15, p. 729.

Courtenay in Oxfordshire.<sup>23</sup> The third daughter Amabel (d. unknown), who we know the least about, married Reginald de Lucy, whose lands are unknown, but was likely a close relation of the justiciar Richard de Lucy.<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy that fewer charters are extant for the later generations suggesting that they may also have issued fewer charters. Alice II, Cecily II, and Cecily II's daughter Hawise, only issued one charter each relating to the Honour of Skipton while Alice I issued nine, Avise five, and Cecily I six.<sup>25</sup> While some of this might be down to loss of evidence, the pattern is consistent enough to suggest that repeated partitioning of lands and marriages, sometimes into comital ranks, physically removed women from their natal inheritance and its management.

The Arches and St Quentin families can be tied to each other and provide a further five women in total. Three of the women are more present in the material; Juetta II de Arches, Agnes de Arches and Alice de St Quentin. In total the five women were present in 17 charters, issuing 11 of them independently.<sup>26</sup> The family line originated from Osbern de Arches (d. c.1115) and his children William de Arches and Agnes de Arches (d. by 1160),

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<sup>23</sup> For Gilbert see *Domesday Descendants*, II, 1076. Roger of Hoveden mentions his office in, Roger of Hoveden, *Chronica Magistri Roger de Houedene*, ed. and trans. William Stubbs, 4 vols (London, 1869), II, 191. In the 1190s Robert de Courtenay claimed his father's lordship, *Pipe Roll of 2 Richard I*, ed. and trans. Doris M. Stenton (London, 1925), p. 31; *A History of the County of Berkshire*, ed. William Page and P. H. Ditchfield, 3 vols (London, 1924) [hereafter *VCH*], IV, 369-379, esp. 372.

<sup>24</sup> For Reginald see *EYC*, VII, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Cecily II: *EYC*, VII, no. 31. Hawise: *EYC*, VII, no. 45

<sup>26</sup> Juetta I de Arches: (gave consent) *EYC*, I, no. 534. Juetta II de Arches: (issued) *EYC*, I, nos. 536, 538, 548, 549, 552, 553. Agnes de Arches: (issued) *EYC*, III, no. 1331. Alice de St Quentin: (issued) *EYC*, I, nos. 541, 543; *EYC*, III, nos. 1337, 1338; *EYC*, XI, no. 96; (gave consent) *EYC*, I, no. 546. Agnes daughter of Alice de St Quentin: (witnessed) *EYC*, I, nos. 541, 543, 545.

sometimes referred to as Agnes de Catfoss, one of the three women here.<sup>27</sup> The family held no single honour in Yorkshire, but Osbern is most likely identifiable as a sheriff of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire of the same name.<sup>28</sup> The family were sizable landholders in Craven, in the East Riding, and were important tenants of the Honour of Mowbray.<sup>29</sup> William, who succeeded to his father's lands by 1115-18, and his wife, Juetta I de Arches, had two daughters; Juetta II and Matilda. Matilda became prioress at Nun Monkton after 1147 while Juetta II, for whom we have six extant charters, became sole heiress and is a case study for this paper.<sup>30</sup> In or around 1151 she married Roger de Flamville (d. 1168), tenant of Roger de Mowbray, after his death she married, c.1170-74, her second husband Adam II de Brus, heir of Guisborough.<sup>31</sup> Juetta II's aunt, Agnes de Arches is another main case. At an unknown

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<sup>27</sup> *EYC*, I, 408, 419-20, no. 527. Agnes may have been born in the late eleventh century, maybe as early as 1085. She was dead by 1160, maybe as early as 1143.

<sup>28</sup> Judith Green, *English Sheriffs to 1154* (London, 1990), pp. 54, 89.

<sup>29</sup> *EYC*, I, 408-10, 413-17, 419, 421, nos. 527-29, 534-36, 538, 541. *Red Book*, I, 419. By 1166 these were held by Roger de Flamvill when 7 of the 8.5 knights's fees he held belonged to the Arches fee. See also: Paul Dalton, *Conquest, Anarchy and Lordship: Yorkshire, 1066-1154* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> For Matilda at Nun Monkton see *EYC*, I, no. 535; *VCH, York*, III, 122-23. Juetta II issued *EYC*, I, nos. 536, 538, 548, 549, 552, 553.

<sup>31</sup> Juetta II's marriages are a topic of debate. Farrer and Ricketts argue that Roger de Flamville was her second husband and that her first was Adam I de Brus. *EYC*, I, 415; *EYC*, II, 12; Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, pp. 328, 332, 425. However, Juetta appears to have lived until c.1206, see *EYC*, I, nos. 536, 538. If Roger was her second husband, she would have presumably remained a widow for an unusually long time from his death in 1168 until her own in 1206, see *EYC*, I, 415. It is more likely that Juetta remarried after Roger and that her second husband was Adam II de Brus who died in 1196. *Domesday Descendants*, II, 354-55; Ruth M. Blakely, *The Brus Family In England and Scotland 1100-1295* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 43-45; Ruth M. Blakely, 'The Bruses of Skelton and William of Aumale', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, LXXIII (2001), pp. 19-28, esp. p. 23. This marriage order is also a better fit with the dating of William de Arches' death. Farrer dates this to c.1150, *EYC*, I, 420. William was certainly dead by 1166 as he does not appear in the 1166 *Cartae*

date she married her first husband Herbert de St Quentin, a retainer of the lord of Holderness and earls of Gloucester, by whom she had three children, Alice, Alan, and Walter. It is not known when Herbert died, but Agnes' charters suggest she was widowed in the 1140s and re-married by the 1150s.<sup>32</sup> Her second husband was Robert de Fauconberg, whose main estate was in Rise, and by whom she had at least one son, Peter. The lives of Agnes and Herbert's sons, Alan and Walter, are unclear, but their daughter Alice de St Quentin, who is the final case study, can be identified in six charters. Alice married well and her first husband, whom she married before 1135, was Robert Fitz Fulk, steward of the Honour of Percy. Robert died c.1148 and her second marriage in c.1150 was to Eustace de Merc, who had inherited lands in Stibbington, Huntingdonshire.<sup>33</sup> Alice's known children, four sons and three daughters, were with her first husband Robert, with three of the sons pre-deceasing the parents with no

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*Baronum*, see *Red book*, I, 412-36. His mid-century death would suggest that Juetta's first marriage took place while William was still alive and her second marriage was soon after his death.

<sup>32</sup> *EYC*, I, nos. 1331-33. The charter issued 1144-54 by Agnes mentions only her first husband and children from this marriage. Subsequent confirmations of Agnes' grant, issued 1143-54 and 1147-c.1170, mention Peter de Fauconberg and would suggest that Agnes' second marriage took place between the grant and its confirmations. Peter issued a charter 1154-60 which makes his birth possible c.1143-44; *EYC*, I, no. 1321. See also *The Chartulary of St John of Pontefract*, ed. Richard Holmes, 2 vols (Leeds, 1899), II, 491-92; Dalton, *Conquest and Anarchy*, p. 254; *Domesday Descendants*, II, 696.

<sup>33</sup> Alice could have married Eustace as early as 1150, but more likely by 1163, *EYC*, I, nos. 543, 546. Her earliest charter from 1144-50 (*EYC*, I, no. 541) mentions her son Robert, but not her first husband. It is possible that this is her interim widowhood and her husband had died before its issue. *VCH, Huntingdon*, III, 218. For Eustace's lands in Stibbington; William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6 vols (London: 1817-1830) [hereafter *Mon. Ang.*], II, 602, no. XIX which prints a confirmation charter describing him as 'Eustachius filius Henrici de Merch'.

issue.<sup>34</sup> The couple's final son, Robert steward of William de Percy, became their heir, and although the couple's three daughters were alive in 1202, little is known about them.<sup>35</sup>

An overview of the women's families and marriages thus establishes them within Yorkshire's lesser aristocratic landholding society. We can now address the charters in relation to public and private interactions to further demonstrate individual actions and relationships evident in the extant charters. The analysis will first address women's role in monasticism and second women's secular networks and relationships.

Monastic foundations, grants to houses, and confirmation charters can tell us a significant amount about women's religious and social networks. The expansion of monasticism in twelfth-century Yorkshire has been well documented and researched with Janet Burton and Emilia Jamroziak arguing that the lesser aristocracy's patronage was an important factor in it.<sup>36</sup> An initial analysis of the three families, who were wealthy and highly involved in the process of founding and patronage, would suggest that they fit this model. The Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin families founded or co-founded a total of four houses, one male and three female, which represented three different orders. The only male

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<sup>34</sup> For their children see: *EYC*, I, 419-21, nos. 541, 543-46; *EYC*, XI, 89-104; Christopher Wales, *The Knight in Twelfth-Century Lincolnshire* (unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge, 1983), p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> *EYC*, I, 420, no. 546. One daughter, Agnes daughter of Alice de St Quentin can be found in charters. She witnessed three times; *EYC*, I, nos. 541, 543, 545. The first two were issued by her mother and the third by her brother.

<sup>36</sup> Janet Burton, *The Monastic Order in Yorkshire: 1069-1215* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 184; Emilia Jamroziak, 'How Rievaulx Abbey Remembered its Benefactors', in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power*, ed. Emilia Jamroziak and Janet Burton (Turnhout, 2006), p. 69.

foundation, the Augustinian priory of Embsay, was established sometime around 1120 by Cecily de Rumilly and William Meschin within a few miles of the heart of the Skipton honour.<sup>37</sup> As the house outgrew its original lands the founders' daughter Alice I de Rumilly moved it a few miles further east to Bolton.<sup>38</sup> The female houses were founded by the Arches and St Quentins. The Benedictine priory of Nun Monkton was co-founded, in the reign of King Stephen, by William de Arches and his wife Juetta.<sup>39</sup> In the last decade of Stephen's reign the final two houses were founded – the Benedictine priory of Nunkeeling by Agnes de Arches and the priory of Nun Appleton, which adopted Cistercian rule, by Agnes' daughter Alice de St Quentin and her son and heir Robert.<sup>40</sup> While two houses were co-founded by married couples, two were founded by a widow on her own or with her son. This pattern also corresponds to general monasticism trends identified by Burton, who suggested that women of the lesser aristocracy could partake in patronage that was comparable with that of lesser aristocratic men.<sup>41</sup> As founders of monastic houses, women acted during their married and widowed life cycle stages. Foundations involving women were also not limited to co-

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<sup>37</sup> *The Lost Cartulary of Bolton Priory*, ed. Katrina Legg (Woodbridge, 2009), nos. 1-3; *EYC*, VII, no. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *EYC*, VII, no. 17.

<sup>39</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 535.

<sup>40</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 541; *EYC*, III, no. 1331. The Cistercian order did not officially accept nuns and so they were unofficial followers of the order. Burton, *Monastic Order*, pp. 146-47. The Victoria County History credits the foundation to Eustace de Merc and Alice and dates it to c.1150, *VCH, York*, III, 119-22. However, they are referring to a charter which could be dated to as late as c.1163. An earlier charter, dating to 1144-50, issued by Alice with her son Robert is addressed to the same beneficiary as in Eustace and Alice's: 'Deo et Sancte Marie Sanctoque Johanni apostolo et ... sanctimonialibus ibidem deo servientibus'. The foundation appears therefore to have been originally made by Alice and Robert.

<sup>41</sup> Burton, *Monastic Order*, pp. 45-68, esp. 67; Brian Golding, 'Coming of the Cluniacs', *ANS*, III (1980), pp. 66-67.

founding with spouses or male kin, but could also include independent ventures into monastic patronage.

The foundation of religious houses and smaller grants and confirmations had social implications. Foundations and grants were intended as acts of personal piety, but they were also economic transactions and social statements of wealth and ability to do so.<sup>42</sup> The act of founding monasteries appealed to the lesser aristocracy as a means to promote their secular status and spiritual piety.<sup>43</sup> Nun Monkton's foundation by William and Juetta de Arches, for example, had clear spiritual motives, as it was to allow their daughter Matilda entry into religion.<sup>44</sup> However, even this demonstrates some socially driven motives as the public act of founding a monastic house was itself an important statement of status. We can observe a comparable example of these spiritual and personal motives in Matilda de Percy's 1189 refoundation of Sawley Abbey, her father's Cistercian foundation. The re-foundation charter states that Matilda did so because the abbey had fallen into disrepair and she wished to save the foundation and her family from its shameful situation.<sup>45</sup> Matilda's re-founding charter

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<sup>42</sup> Christopher Harper-Bill, 'The Piety of the Anglo-Norman Knightly Class', *ANS*, II (1979), pp. 63-77, 173-76, esp. p. 67; John Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, p. 172. Emma Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England, 1066-1135* (London, 1998), pp. 152-53, 168-69, 181.

<sup>43</sup> Burton, *Monastic Order*, pp. 184, 188, 193; Emilia Jamroziak and Janet Burton, 'Introduction', in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation*, ed. Emilia Jamroziak and Janet Burton (Turnhout, 2006), p. 2; Karen Stöber, 'Bequests and Burials: Changing Attitudes of the Laity as Patrons of English and Welsh Monasteries' in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation*, ed. Emilia Jamroziak and Janet Burton (Turnhout, 2006), p. 146.

<sup>44</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 535 and *Mon. Ang.*, IV, 194, no. I. 'Carta sua confirmasse deo et sancte marie et matilde filie sue et sanctimonialibus de monketon ibidem deo servientibus totam terram suam in Munketon'.

<sup>45</sup> *Sallay Chartulary*, ed. Joseph McNulty, 2 vols (Wakefield, 1934), II, no. 615 from British Library, *Sallay Chartulary*, Harleian MS 112, fols 166-66v. Also pd. in *Mon. Ang.*, V, 512-13, no. V; *EYC*, XI, no. 50.

also illustrates her importance as a Cistercian patron. As countess, rather than a lesser aristocrat, her links to Cistercian ecclesiastics reached abroad and her re-foundation was counselled by two visiting abbots - Julian of Igny and William Mortemer from Champagne and Normandy respectively.<sup>46</sup> The family connection, tied with spiritual needs and with her connections to clergy, are demonstrative of the layered social and economic motives for monastic patronage.

Women's significance as agents pushing forward religious sentiment can also be seen in the orders represented by the foundations, such as Augustinians at Embsay and Cistercians at Nun Appleton. Both were new continental orders and women's promotion of them suggests awareness of new monastic fashions.<sup>47</sup> Founding these orders can therefore be related to secular motives rather than religious piety only. For example, the Augustinian house of Embsay and its re-incarnation at Bolton have no charter evidence to suggest that it was intended as a point of entry into religion for the men of the family. Instead, it is more likely that the foundation and transfer were pious acts and social statements. In terms of women's actions, the foundation and move both occurred during times of marriage; Cecily I acted with her spouse while Alice I's charter dates to her second marriage but is issued alone.<sup>48</sup> Instead of a simple reading of religious piety, the patronage of Bolton and the dating of its foundation and move are suggestive of significant social role based on the Rumilly family's status in Skipton and their wealth.

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<sup>46</sup> 'consilio domini Juliani Igniascensis, et domini Willielmi de Mortuomari abbatum visitorum'. Julian was Julian of Igny, abbot of the Abbey of Igny from in the diocese of Rheims and situated about 30km west-southwest of Rheims. William was William of Mortemer, abbot of Mortemer Abbey from the diocese of Rouen and located about 35km southeast of Rouen.

<sup>47</sup> Burton, *Monastic Order*, pp. 190-92; Cownie, *Religious Patronage*, p. 169.

<sup>48</sup> *Lost Cartulary*, nos. 1-3; *EYC*, VII, nos. 7, 17.



Charters relating to the four monastic foundations also indicate how women were interacting with significant ecclesiastic leaders. The four foundations that involved Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin women are all recorded in notification or confirmation charters issued by archbishops.<sup>49</sup> At least one woman, Cecily I de Rumilly, with her spouse and co-founder, had also addressed the same archbishop about the foundation.<sup>50</sup> While this is not evidence of personal relationships, John Hudson has argued that episcopal addressees were used to add weight to gifts.<sup>51</sup> Some engagement between the parties did occur and Archbishops Thurstan and William issued confirmation charters ‘ad presentationem’ and ‘petitione’ of Cecily I Rumilly and Agnes de Arches respectively.<sup>52</sup> Nun Appleton’s confirmation charter was also issued by an archbishop and describes that they had seen the foundation charter.<sup>53</sup> Seeking archiepiscopal support was surely likely to strengthen the impact of women’s patronage on a local level. The confirmations also suggest women’s awareness of monastic key players and their ability to partake in local discourse on religious patronage.

The Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin women’s religious patronage extended monastic connections further afield to other houses. The Rumilly women issued 13 charters to Embsay

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<sup>49</sup> EYC, VII, no. 3, also in *Mon. Ang.*, VI:I, 205, no. XI.

<sup>50</sup> Notification pd. in *Lost Cartulary*, no. 2; EYC, VII, no. 2; in *Mon. Ang.*, VI:I, 203, no. II

<sup>51</sup> Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship*, p. 160.

<sup>52</sup> Thurstan’s text: EYC, VII, no. 8; *Mon. Ang.*, VI:I, 205, no. XII. William’s text is pd.: *English Episcopal Acta*, v: *York, 1070-1154*, ed. Janet Burton, (Oxford, 1988), no. 98; EYC, III, no. 1332; *Mon. Ang.*, IV, 187, no. IV. No original survives, but earliest surviving copy is in the Cartulary of Nunkeeling Priory, British Library, MS Cotton, Otho C. viii, f. 67v.

<sup>53</sup> Avrom Saltman, *Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1956), p. 412, no. 189. ‘Carta predicta Adeliz quam oculis nostris conspeximus attestatur’. This is a charter of T[heobald] of Canterbury from 1138-61, Saltman suggests it may be 1153-54. York’s vacancy and the papal legate council in the 1150s would explain the use of Canterbury rather than York.

and Bolton demonstrating geographically focused patronage.<sup>54</sup> They also gave grants to St Bees priory in Cumbria, and as this had been founded by William Meschin its patronage demonstrates a continuity of family patronage rather than an out of county anomaly.<sup>55</sup> Beyond family foundations, the Rumillys' patronage was largely confined to Yorkshire where they were patrons of Fountains Abbey and Pontefract Priory. These two houses within Yorkshire illustrate wider regional activity. The patronage of bigger houses provided the Rumilly women with important spiritual and secular benefits within their local society while still demonstrating a geographic focus within Yorkshire. Furthermore, the four houses in receipt of Rumilly support belonged to four different orders - Cluniac, Cistercian, Augustinian and Benedictine - which also places their activities within wider trends of monastic development and expansion.<sup>56</sup> At least one grant, that of Alice II de Rumilly to Fountains in 1186-1192, pre-dated a period of widowhood and occurred during a first marriage.<sup>57</sup> Patronage, both independently and with others, to all four houses as beneficiaries, fell into periods of marriage and widowhood. Women's role as monastic patrons, performed at different stages across their life cycles, demonstrates pious actions and social connections within a general patronage network that came to shape monastic landscapes.

As well as having the agency to shape religious landscapes, women were also active in their families and secular society. As mothers or wives women could affect their children's

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<sup>54</sup> This accounts for charters issued by the women alone with no co-issuers and no *laudatio parentum* clause; in total they issued 26 such charters.

<sup>55</sup> *The Register of the Priory of St Bees*, ed. James Wilson (London: 1915), nos. 12, 13, 15 (Alice I); nos. 14, 490 (Alice II issued), no. 435 (Alice II gave consent); nos. 27, 28, 225 (Cecily II).

<sup>56</sup> Burton, *Monastic Order*, pp. 5-10.

<sup>57</sup> *EYC*, VII, no. 32.

patronage patterns so that these came to mirror that of the women. Such continuity can be identified in a confirmation charter issued by Alice de St Quentin's son Robert son of Robert Fitz Fulk in 1163-c.1170 which confirmed to Nun Appleton Priory what Alice had given them.<sup>58</sup> Alice's significance to Robert's confirmation is identifiable in two references to her as the original grantor which imply that her son's patronage was a consequence of her original grant. A similar effect of women within the family can be seen with Embsay Priory. Founded by Cecily I de Rumilly and her husband William Meschin around 1120 with further grants by Cecily in the 1130s, her children continued as patrons of Embsay. When the monks required more space around 1155, Alice instigated the priory's transfer to Bolton.<sup>59</sup> It is illustrative of her family's local importance that Alice I, in 1155 either a widow or not long married to her second spouse Alexander Fitz Gerald, transferred the priory without references to spouses or marital status. Cecily's foundation also had a role in shaping her male kin's patronage. In 1131-40, a period overlapping her first marriage, widowhood, and second marriage, and again in 1135-40, this time in her second marriage, Cecily independently granted the mill and a church in the vill of Kildwick to Embsay.<sup>60</sup> Both grants were confirmed in co-issued charters by Cecily and her second husband Henry de Tracy. The confirmations demonstrate how the grants had been by Cecily and had subsequently shaped the actions of her spouse.<sup>61</sup> In 1151-53, still in her second marriage, Cecily independently issued a further charter regarding the vill of Kildwick.<sup>62</sup> This charter is particularly

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<sup>58</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 545. 'quam fecit Aeliz de Sancto Quintino mater mea' ... 'per matrem meam positas'.

<sup>59</sup> *EYC*, VII, nos. 17, 19. See also Burton, *Monastic Order*, p. 82.

<sup>60</sup> *EYC*, VII, nos. 4, 7. Also in *Lost Cartulary*, no. 4, 7, 8. Her husband William Meschin died before 1135, *Lost Cartulary*, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *EYC*, VII, nos. 10, 11.

<sup>62</sup> *EYC*, VII, no. 9. Farrer dated the charter to 1135-54; ?1151-53. Upon closer inspection of Skipton charters, the narrower dating is more likely. The date of William Fitz Duncan's death giving the

noteworthy because its disposition records that Cecily had given and conceded the lands and that Cecily and her son-in-law William Fitz Duncan had presented a ceremonial knife at the altar of Saints Mary and Cuthbert.<sup>63</sup> A notification charter issued by William, which seems to have been issued concurrent to Cecily's, confirmed the grant.<sup>64</sup> Cecily's grants relating to Kildwick are independent of spousal references and also pre-date the co-issued confirmations which still describe the giving as her action. Co-patronage of Henry and William with Cecily does not indicate coercion by the men, but rather suggest that as heiress of Skipton and the priory's co-founder she influenced her family's actions. Women's monastic patronage created standards which their spouses, children, and in-laws followed.

Women's role in landholding and alienation also gave them a position to shape secular relationships and determine family wealth. Juetta de Arches' grant of lands in Askham to her daughter Isabella would have decreased the extent of lands which her son Peter might have hoped to inherit.<sup>65</sup> Two charters issued by Alice de St Quentin to her son William provide further evidence of women's influence over children's landholding.<sup>66</sup> The charters, issued 1157-c.1180 and c.1166-1180, fall into her second marriage. As they make no reference to her spouse they are indicative of independence, especially in later marriages, to manage inheritances. The charters explain that William is to hold the lands in Immingham by the same service as Alice's son Robert did when he had given her the lands. Further

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limit of 1154 and his return to Skipton and Craven in 1151 giving the other. William had married Alice 1135-38.

<sup>63</sup> *Lost Cartulary*, no. 6; *EYC*, VII, no. 9. 'dedi et concessi ... ego et gener meus ... obtulimus easdem per unum cultellum villas'.

<sup>64</sup> *EYC*, VII, no. 12. Dating is based on ten shared witnesses.

<sup>65</sup> *EYC*, I, nos. 548, 549.

<sup>66</sup> *EYC*, III, no. 1338.

securing of the land's future is also addressed by stating that if William was to die before he had children with his wife, the land would be held by one of his siblings:

‘sin autem heredes de sua propria sponsa habuerit . Walterus frater eius illam terram predicto modo post Willelmi obitum habeat . et si Walterus decesserit; Henricus frater eius predictam terram predicto modo teneat . si autem Henricus obierit . Sibilla habeat soror eius.’<sup>67</sup>

Alice's control over her family's landholding illustrates how familial exchanges of lands and services shaped and secured landed wealth. These could shape the next generation's landholding and inheritance patterns and therefore could shape long-term family landholdings and relationships.

The Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin families were affected by the women's land alienations, but it is important to address family and women's actions as separate. Although actions might have taken place alongside family, such as co-issuing charters with them or having family beneficiaries, women's grants and charters often expressed their own actions rather than family actions or actions proxy to male kin. Alice de St Quentin's charter to her son addressed family and family lands, but the use of first person pronouns implies that the disposition is her action. Alice de St Quentin also issued two charters while married to Eustace de Merc, but these make no mention of Eustace or other male kin as co-issuers or if they gave consent to it.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Juetta de Arches' grant of Askham, to her daughter Isabella in 1192, made in Juetta's second marriage, describes the lands as 'mine' [terram meam] and makes no references to her spouse.<sup>69</sup> Ruth Blakely has identified Juetta's lands as originating from the Arches fee, which would mean they were either her dowry or

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<sup>67</sup> *EYC*, XI, no. 96.

<sup>68</sup> *EYC*, III, no. 1338; *EYC*, XI, no. 96.

<sup>69</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 548.

inheritance.<sup>70</sup> As heiress, Juetta's lands were defined as hers and, despite being married at the time of the grant, Juetta was an active agent in respect to the lands with no apparent intervention from her husband. The independence of women's actions in their charters strongly indicates that twelfth-century lesser aristocratic women could be social agents of their own right.

A third area in which lesser aristocratic women were able to engage with society through landholding was in general secular society and social networks through official roles, even through lord-vassal relationships. As described by Paul Hyams, lord-vassal relationships were based on reciprocal terms and duties which both tenant and lord were expected to perform.<sup>71</sup> Lands held by women, whether they were dower, dowry, or inheritance seem to have been used to form such lordship relationships. Indeed, references to vassals and tenants in the women's charter activity can be identified. Of Juetta de Arches' six extant charters, a widowhood charter from 1196-1205, is addressed to Alan son of Ellis her knight and man [militi meo et homini meo] for the service of a fourth part of a knight's fee.<sup>72</sup> Alan seems to have served Juetta in some form before this and when he witnessed a charter issued by Juetta, during her second marriage in 1187-c.1190, Alan is described as her steward [senescallo domine Juetete].<sup>73</sup> Juetta's secular and non-familial connections may also have included others, as the charter Alan witnessed is in fact a confirmation of a grant by Juetta's man [homo meus] William son of Henry de Beningburgh. Juetta was not the only woman whose

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<sup>70</sup> Blakely, *The Brus Family*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>71</sup> Hyams, 'Warranty and Good Lordship', pp. 447-48.

<sup>72</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 536.

<sup>73</sup> *EYC*, I, no. 552.

witnesses suggest men could relate roles or occupations to them and Alice de St Quentin issued charters that were witnessed by a squire or attendant, ‘Simon armiger domine Alicie’.<sup>74</sup> In Cecily I and Alice I de Rumilly’s charters it is possible to identify attestations by members of the le Fleming family who are described as stewards.<sup>75</sup> Women’s accountability over tenancies with knights-fees attached can also be attested to by the exchequer’s records and in the 1166 *Cartae Baronum*, Avice de Rumilly, identifiable as mother of William III de Curcy, held two knights’ fees from Robert de Gant in Yorkshire.<sup>76</sup> The relationships involving female lordship demonstrate the role and actions taken by women. Women’s landholding and their ability to alienate it to individuals like stewards and knights for their services suggest that women held significant landholding power that allowed them to enter lord-vassal relationships regardless of their gender.

Witness lists provide even more evidence of individuals around women and suggest who may have been part of women’s secular networks. Charters issued by Cecily I and Alice I de Rumilly in Skipton list a broad range of witnesses made up of local individuals, with references to secular roles like chamberlain, constable, forester, and cook, as well as ecclesiastics such as chaplain and clerk.<sup>77</sup> The use of significant ecclesiastic office holders

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<sup>74</sup> *EYC*, III, no. 1338; *EYC*, XI, no. 96.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Reiner dapifero’ *EYC*, III, no. 1861; *EYC*, VII, nos 4, 129. ‘William Flandrensis dapifer’ *EYC*, VII, no. 24). Other Fleming family attestations are found in *EYC*, VII, nos. 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 18, 28, 39.

<sup>76</sup> *Red book*, I, 433. ‘Avicia mater Willelmi de Curcy, tenet feoda ij militum’.

<sup>77</sup> In Cecily’s charters: *EYC*, VII, no. 4 (‘constabulario’, ‘capellano’); no. 5 (‘capellanus hujus carte scriptor’ ‘cementarius’); no. 6 (‘capellanus scriptor hujus carte’, ‘constabularius’); nos. 7, 9 (‘camerario’). In Alice’s charters: *EYC*, VII, nos. 16, 23, 29 (‘capellanus’); nos. 13, 18, 21 (‘archidiacono’); no. 17 (‘archid[iacono], ‘camerario’); no. 22 (‘archidiacono’, ‘decano’, ‘capellano’, ‘cementario’); no. 26 (‘capellano’, two ‘forestario’), no. 28 (‘capellanus’, two ‘clericus’).

who were not associated with the women's households, such as Osbert archdeacon of Richmond and Ralf the rural dean of Craven, demonstrates the potential of lesser aristocratic women's social connections while also indicating that some geographical limits did apply.<sup>78</sup> Some individuals were more likely to have connections to the honorial household while others, such as stone mason or constable and religious offices, were more likely to have local connections only. Two of the charters also identify scribes, but it is not clear if these were Rumilly household scribes, third-party, or beneficiary scribes.<sup>79</sup> Other witnesses, such as the Mauleverer family, who were neither office holders nor described in terms that implied honorial lord-vassal relationships, push women's networks beyond familial or lord-vassal circles. The Mauleverers were active patrons of Embsay, and later Bolton, in Skipton and - based on grants to Bolton priory and references to sub-tenants - they may have been tenants in the honour.<sup>80</sup> Identifying a local connection between the two families is further supported by Cecily I and Alice I issuing confirmations of Mauleverer grants and having them as witnesses in the women's other charters.<sup>81</sup> The array of individuals, offices, and styles among Rumilly witness lists supports the argument that local society acknowledged women's social and practical right to issue charters and manage lands.

It is important to note that although the status of heiress was a significant source of landholding and wealth, non-heiresses were not outside social networks. Agnes de Arches

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<sup>78</sup> John Le Neve, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300*, ed. Diana Greenway, 11 vols (London: 1968-2011), VI, 47; *EYC*, VII, 70, 150. Osbert was archdeacon 1121-1157 when he resigned from the office. All five witnesses by him as archdeacon in the Rumilly charters could have taken place in this period.

<sup>79</sup> *EYC*, VII, nos. 5, 6.

<sup>80</sup> *EYC*, VII, nos. 57-60, 62, 63, 68, 84.

<sup>81</sup> *EYC*, VII, nos. 7, 9, 10-12, 14, 15, 18, 23 include Mauleverers. *EYC*, VII, nos. 5, 6, 13 are confirmations of Mauleverer grants by Cecily I and Alice I.



was not an heiress, but was able to issue a charter to Nunkeeling priory granting them three carucates of land and 12d. annual rent from a croft held by Alice wife of Gamel.<sup>82</sup> The terms of the grant and the financial details redirecting payment to Nunkeeling would indicate that a tenurial relationship existed between Agnes and Alice, the croft's tenant. Being an heiress would have increased women's role as landholders and, indeed, most of the examples from the three families were heiresses.<sup>83</sup> However, inheritance by women was not always of the whole estate and the Rumilly inheritance was divided between daughters in two consecutive generations.<sup>84</sup> The status of heiress was also dependent on the absence of brothers. Indeed, seven of the women in the study became heiresses because their child-less brothers predeceased them. Alice de St Quentin only became the heiress of her parent's lands by 1152 when her brothers died. Her marriage to Robert Fitz Fulk, which took place before 1150 had therefore occurred before Alice's status as heiress was fully secure.<sup>85</sup> According to Paul Dalton, the marriage was intended to attach Robert to a broad familial and tenurial network of the St Quentin family.<sup>86</sup> Alice and Robert's marriage should therefore be interpreted through her status as heiress and her family. Heiresses and non-heiresses should not be viewed solely by this status, but also in relation to familial and local networks. To fully contextualise lesser

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<sup>82</sup> EYC, III, no. 1331. '... et xii denarius annuatim imperpetuum de crofto quod Aeliz uxor Gamelli tenuit quicunque illud tenuere.'

<sup>83</sup> Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, p. 297.

<sup>84</sup> Ricketts, *High Ranking Widows*, pp. 107, 113.

<sup>85</sup> EYC, I, 420: Farrer argues that she had brothers Walter and Alan. Keats-Rohan argues that she had a brother called Robert which would also be supported by Dugdale's *Monasticon* where her mother, in her foundation of Nunkeeling, mentions sons Walter and Robert. *Domesday Descendants*, II, 580, 696-97, 889; *Mon. Ang.*, IV, 186-87.

<sup>86</sup> Dalton, *Conquest and Anarchy*, p. 254.

aristocratic women, we must therefore discuss their lands, marriages, natal families, and social networks with clergy and laity.

Another important element of social status that has often been linked to women's social agency is their status as widows. The women in this study issued charters as widows but also as wives. Cecily I and Alice I de Rumilly first appear with their first husbands and continue as sole issuers into their widowhoods and later marriages.<sup>87</sup> Avice and Cecily II de Rumilly, and Juetta and Agnes de Arches both appear to start as early as their first widowhoods, while Alice de St Quentin's first charter dates to her second marriage.<sup>88</sup> Alice II de Rumilly is the only woman who issued a charter independently while married to her first spouse.<sup>89</sup> This would suggest that married lesser aristocratic women acted as landholders. As demonstrated by charters dateable to first or second marriages, women's access to lands did not begin at widowhood, nor did it cease when women re-married. Unfortunately, the marital stages of female issuers cannot always be established with certainty and this has led to historians assuming that many of these were issued during periods of widowhood. However, a careful examination of charter language in each case suggests that by re-considering the chronology of women's charter issuing and allowing married women scope as landholders, their role in society can be developed further and the constraints of lifecycle in analysing women can be eased. By placing lesser aristocratic women's agency within their families and relationships as heiresses or widows, women's charter activity can be better contextualised within a longer social narrative.

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<sup>87</sup> Cecily: *EYC*, III, no. 1861; *EYC*, VII, nos. 7, 9. Alice I: *EYC*, VII, nos. 18, 26.

<sup>88</sup> Avice: *EYC*, III, no. 1862; *EYC*, VI, no. 48. Cecily II: *EYC*, VII, no. 31. Juetta: *EYC*, I, nos. 538, 548-49, 552. Alice: *EYC*, III, nos. 1337-38; *EYC*, XI, no. 96.

<sup>89</sup> Alice II: *EYC*, VII, no. 32.

The case study families demonstrate that the extant charter evidence is sufficient for an analysis of twelfth-century lesser aristocratic women in local society. Charters to secular and religious beneficiaries place women into notable social relationships that are identifiable through family, inheritance, and lordship. Lesser aristocratic women could and did participate in social networks and landholding by performing patronage, land alienations, and lord-vassal relationships. Building social connections from Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin women's charters this paper has argued that women were significant participants in twelfth-century Yorkshire society. Lesser aristocratic women were established as agents in the family, and through charters dealing with land alienations their actions reached the wider landscape of monastic patronage, and tenorial or lord-vassal relationships.

What the case studies also show is that lesser aristocratic women's agency and networks were, unsurprisingly, often limited physically by geography, lifecycle roles, or status as heiress. The lesser aristocracy's landholding in the twelfth century put them in a position to build networks, but not outwith their means. These factors should not, however, undermine the significant extent to which women could participate in these geographically and materially smaller networks or landscapes. The study of women's charters illustrates how this approach helps establish a more holistic view of women's roles in religious and secular networks. The conclusions offered in this paper serve to confirm women's importance in society, and also to offer a further element for consideration by accounting for the variabilities of geography and source survival. Lesser aristocratic women held land and were part of their family networks and the Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin cases have shown that lesser aristocratic women had significant bearing on their localities. The landholding of these selected Yorkshire lesser aristocratic women was not exceptional, and serves to demonstrate medieval women's opportunities and actions.

Appendix 1: Genealogical Trees for the Rumilly, Arches, and St Quentin families.

[see file: "Family Trees"]



