

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Dr. Katia Wright, Assistant Curator of the Adjutant General's Corps Museum in the UK to talk about medieval queens as landowners.

KW: So the main thing really is that to understand that all queens held property, held land, in some form or another, especially in medieval England. For the majority of queens, property was their main source of consistent and substantial income. And as the old adage goes, money makes the world go round. Receiving this income was incredibly vital for them to fulfill their duties and other expectations as queen. However, this was about more than just money. By holding property, queens became landlords. They had tenants and an entire administrative system to manage. Looking at the role of queens as landlords or lords of an estate throws into question many different aspects of queenship and their land ownership. So we talk about things like how the property was granted and the language around all of that, the legal ownership of their lands, impact of their land ownership on the role of the queen and vice versa, their financial independence and security, but also their unique vulnerabilities as queen, and questions around the terms of dower and everything.

AT: Now, since you've brought up the word dower, I assume most people are familiar with the term dowry, but how is that different from a dower? Which, just to be clear for those of you who are not reading the words, we mean D-O-W-E-R, not D-O-U-R, which just means bummed out, basically.

KW: So dower and dowry both are related to money being exchanged or property being exchanged in relation to a marriage. And some of the complications or confusions around it because they both originate from the Latin word dos. So dowry is specifically paid by the guardian of a bride, so her father, brother, uncle, or maybe if she's a ward, so whoever's caring for her, a man always. He pays that money to her future husband, or if her husband is a child, to his family, and that always takes place just before the marriage. Dower takes place at the end. It is granted during the marriage ceremony in England. In fact, it's a very important part of the legitimisation of the marriage ceremony, but dower is specifically for the widows. So the groom, as part of the marriage ceremony, will say, "I endow you with this property or this much of my estate." And then when the bride or the wife outlives her husband and becomes a widow, she is then granted her dower. So it's very distinctly different.

AT: My understanding is that because this is tied to the crown, so it is the queen's lands when we're talking about the dower. If you have two simultaneous queens, so say you have a dowager queen and then a new queen consort when the dowager's son takes the throne. My understanding is that that muddies the waters a bit when we're talking about who actually owns which lands compared to non-royal counterparts.

KW: It can do, it certainly does. So you have complications in the fact that there are some queens that are actually heiresses, so they have very small dower properties. So Eleanor of Aquitaine actually is the duchess of Aquitaine so she holds that outright. She's the duchess of

Aquitaine as well as the queen of England. So her dower lands are going to be a lot smaller than the queen from a different period or even say her daughter-in-law. However, you have the complications of what properties the king is going to use. So there are some traditions of granting the same property to queens. This does not stay throughout the whole medieval period. So in the 12th century, we do see this repetition and actually what generally seems to happen, though it's not always the case, is that the dowager maintains those properties and keeps those properties until her death and then the consort is able to hold them. Although obviously following dower law, she wouldn't actually have access to them until she becomes a widow herself and becomes a dowager queen herself.

Now this gets even more complicated when you consider the rules around queenly dower, because queenly dower did not follow the same rules as the nobility. So as I said a moment ago, dower is all about the widow. It's meant to be to fund the widow. But across different periods in medieval England, consort queens, so wives of kings, had access to dower property whilst they were a wife and before their husbands died. So this happens in the 14th century, sort of evolves and continues on from the 14th century. But it also was a custom in the Norman period. So Norman queens, early medieval queens, were also accessing their dower as consorts and it sort of changed as their finances changed essentially, as they had other sources of income. So when it comes down to this idea of competition, you have a dowager who's holding property, but especially in the 14th century, which is where my area of expertise is. You have a dowager who's holding property, but you have a consort who also needs income.

And there's a really fantastic example of this in the 14th century of where there's a really big problem with this. And that's Margaret of France. She's the second queen of Edward I. She gets married in 1299 and her husband dies in 1307. She's granted her dower lands, except her stepson-in-law, Edward II, then marries Isabella of France, who's actually Margaret's niece, in early 1308. So Isabella needs to be funded as the consort, but Margaret has the dower lands. So although there's at this point, there is no evidence of them actually sort of continuing of this tradition of there being a set domain, a set queenly property group that they then sort of pass on to each queen. Edward II is not able to give property to Isabella. He gives her other sources of income. He does give her some property, but it's very, very small. And we see him sort of trying to pay off her debts and all sorts of things. He's struggling to pay for Isabella essentially, whilst Margaret is still alive. And then Margaret dies in early 1318. And about a month later, we see all these big grants to Isabella of property coming in. And it's all her dower grants. So they're saying she can hold these properties like Margaret held them. It's not completely identical. He adds a few extra in, which I like to think is because of inflation or maybe because he obviously liked her at the time. They had quite a tumultuous marriage. So that's a whole other discussion. So he gives her all of these properties. And then because Isabella's got these financial struggles, she needs to be funded in some way, we start to see the custom around dower changing in the 14th century. And we see him say, this is her dower, but she's going to have access to it now so she can access it and do everything she's meant to maintaining the properties, appointing officials, collecting all the rents and whatnot from these properties now. And you can see it's a bit of a change because a lot of the royal officials don't really listen to the king. And he keeps having to say, "Oi, give my wife access to this forest" and things like that. It's quite amusing for a couple of years. You see these type, these little sort of announcements or

letters of patent, they're called and so say, "no, you're not doing this correctly, you need to follow what I've told you." So it's quite amusing actually. And it sort of shows how the changes are taking place. But yeah, so there was competition. There was a problem. And that's one of my favorite examples of sort of showing, showing that change and what the problems were.

AT: I would think that being a landowner having these incomes would be a source of power and security. But my understanding is that when we're talking about Isabella of France, for example, in 1324 and 1330, her husband and then later her son just seized all of her estates. And so she had like almost no income. And the second time she was also placed under house arrest. So it does seem like it's sort of an illusion of security rather than actual security.

KW: Isabella of France, she's an extreme case. She has a very, as I said, a very tumultuous life, a very tumultuous time as queen. She's famously known as the she-wolf of France, which is quite a nasty term when you understand the origins of it. But they're all quite cross with her because she ousts her husband and then sort of rules with a man who is meant to be her lover. Obviously, we can never know for certain. So she goes from this very popular queen to annoying everyone basically. Well, at first they like that she gets rid of her husband because he's not a very good king. But then she does all the same things that her husband did. So they get rid of her as well. But yeah, so she's an extreme example.

But the queen is in this unique position. She's a landowner. She's treated like any other magnate within her estates. But she has this unique access to the crown, to the crown's administrative machinery. They can essentially, if they want something done or there's a lot of trespassers, that's one of the examples I look at. So a trespasser is someone's there essentially going into their estates and hunting or whatnot. That's what just one example, or potentially, attacking their tenants or stealing things, etc. They can say, "I want an investigation and they can put pressure on that crown administration because they're just down the road kind of thing to them and it's her husband or a son that's heading this as the monarch. And they have these connections to these officials. So there's this sort of side to it.

But on the other side, the lands that they're granted, if it's granted them by the king, that's the crown's property. So the king has the ultimate control over that property. He can take it away at any time. Now, when he's granting something in dower or for life, whatever, and I'll get into the language at another point, that is meant to be for the queen to hold until her death, essentially. But because it's crown property, he can still take that away. And it could be something like, "oh, I don't realize I've actually granted it to someone else - whoops," and a little swapover, or it can be extreme, like "I'm going to take all of your properties away." And it's, this is where it's very different from a magnate or another lord, because the king cannot take their property. They've inherited that property through family. And the only reason the king can take that property is through treason, or if there is an heir in minority, and they become a ward of the monarch, and in which case, there's still limitations to what he can do.

But this is his lands. This is essentially like your husband owns the house, and says "you can go and live in that room," and "actually I'm really cross with you, with what you've done, or your brother's gone and done something that's made me really cross. So you can't have that room anymore." It's a really strange analogy, I know. But essentially that's what he does.

And in 1324 Isabella's given this incredibly small income sort of as recompense. She just about pays for her household. She can't really fulfill her duties with that kind of income. And she gets it back. But in 1330, she's placed under house arrest because her son's very crossed with her in 1330. And he hosts a coup against her, essentially, and to get rid of her and her supposed lover. So yes, he locks her up and he takes all of her property away. And the first thing he does is grant all of that property to his wife instead to make sure that the consort has money instead of the dowager at this point. And Isabella gets land back again in the 1330s. I mean, six months later, he starts granting her property again. So he wasn't too cross with her. And she comes out of that house arrest. But he's very tactical with what he gives her and to try and limit her power. So it's a really extreme example, but a clear one of that vulnerability that the queen sort of has as this landowner. She's got this extreme power and the upside of being connected to the crown, but she's alternatively got this unique vulnerability that no other landlord has as well.

AT: Now you touched on this a bit, but there are a few different terminologies that you bring up in your academic papers, which I did have a solid go at trying to read them, but it was a bit over my head. So can you tell us the difference between "for life," "during pleasure" and "in dower" in this context?

KW: Well, thank you for for reading them. And I'm more than happy to talk about this. There's just something that I picked up when I started my research. I was doing my PhD over seven years and I kept saying to my supervisors, "there's something going on here with this language. There's a lot more, that we're not talking about." So yeah, there are three distinct grants for queenly properties. The most common, in terms of what we talk about as scholars is in dower, which refers to that property that is meant to be granted for the widow and obviously changes a little bit across medieval periods for queens. But that term is always used in order to protect that property. So whether she holds it as a consort or as a widow, as a dowager queen, that property has to be granted to her when her husband dies. So that's got that legal protection around it. Whereas for life and during pleasure, we actually see the crown uses that for all grants of property, dower is specific to the queen. I would say it's also for princesses that marry princes, but we only have one example of a princess marrying a prince that then becomes a monarch and everything. So I won't go into that.

So for life is essentially, as it sounds, it's for life. It is until the queen dies, from the day of the grant until the queen dies. And it would be the same with anybody else that the king might be granting property to. But specifically for that person's life, not for the monarch's life, so that they have a little bit of control around it in that sense. And obviously, as I said, where it's crown land, he could still take it away if he wanted to. So it's for that whole lifetime.

During pleasure is a really, really funny way of saying, or I think it's funny, a funny way of saying it's a temporary grant. It's for the term of the king's pleasure, whilst he is happy for you to hold it, so he might intend for it to go to somebody else in six years time, and you can hold it until that point. It's a unspecified temporary grant, essentially. It's just a bit of a strange way of saying it, I think, because they don't say for the king's, during the king's pleasure, I think it's just during pleasure. So it makes me chuckle sometimes that way. I had fun trying to track that one down in the original documents.

AT: And then can you tell us what coverture is and how this relates to that?

KW: Yeah, of course. So, coverture refers to the legal status of a woman. So, there were two legal statuses a woman could hold. It was either a feme covert or a feme sole. Feme covert meant essentially, you were married women, and you and all of your possessions belonged to your husband. So, you don't have an independent legal status. On the alternative side of things, there was a feme sole, which was a single woman. So, it was an unmarried woman or a widow when we think of the landowning classes, we think of heiresses and dowagers. And what's interesting in terms of queens and their lands is a queen is a married woman. She is a feme covert, but within her property, the king treats her like she is a feme sole. She rules as the Lord, not as the spouse of the lord, but as the lord. So, we sort of see her as the my lady queen, sort of everything is done by her and her officials, part of the administrative machinery.

There's a really good example of how the king sort of disassociated his relationship with the queen, when it came down to her properties, and when she was maybe a little bit naughty and didn't do what she was meant to. And that is the example of Margaret of France again. She is a dowager so she is technically a feme sole at this point, legally, but it's a really great example of how the king sort of ignores that relationship and everything. So, she was the second queen of Edward I, I think I may have already mentioned. And this takes place in 1311. So, she's actually dowager queen. Her stepson is the king. He's Edward II and he actually has a really good relationship with his stepmother, Margaret. And we see she's referred to all the time as "beloved mother," he doesn't refer to her as stepmother, she's always "beloved mother, Queen Margaret." So, we can see that they have this good relationship. But in 1311, one of her officials in the forest of Gillingham in Dorset dies, and he bequeaths certain properties and rights to his four married daughters. And Margaret, who held the manor and forest of Gillingham as part of her dowager, her steward seized these rights and properties from the heiresses in the queen's name. And the heiresses took Margaret to court. They said, "no, this is the sole property. This is our inheritance.:" And the case made its way all the way up the ladder to the king. So, Edward II, "my beloved mother," he suddenly goes from loving stepson to being a little bit cross with his stepmother. And she suddenly becomes rather coldly "Lady Margaret, queen of Edward I," not queen of England. It's a very clear disassociation. And he actually sides with the heiresses and insists that she must give the property back. And she doesn't at first. So, he tells her again, and it sort of goes over a couple of years as all legal cases do. But we eventually do see Margaret's officials granting those properties and stating verbatim every single tiny little parcel of land that is going to each of the four heiresses.

And it's just a really great example of how the legal system worked, how the queens were treated within their properties as well. And that sort of that differentiation or that separation between the monarch and the consort in these sorts of situations. And so, Margaret's technically a feme sole, but it's a really clear example of that. And we would see that whether the queen was married, or if she was a dowager, queen or not, because she is treated as this lord. And then suddenly, she's no longer my beloved wife or my beloved mother, she's Lady Margaret who's been naughty and not done what she should have done.

AT: So her steward took some stuff that wasn't hers.

KW: That's how it's phrased, because that's how that's always phrased in the same way that when Edward III seizes Isabella of France's lands in December of 1330, it's phrased as Isabella surrendering all of this property to her son. And we see it most clearly because he starts granting out or appointing officials to, she had a huge amount of property at this time, absolutely ginormous, like triple the amount she should have had, more than. But he's granting out or appointing officials left, right and center to try and keep the management going. And keeping it as part of the crown, or specifically the king's administration, rather than the dowager queen's, but it's phrased as "she surrendered it," which is a blatant lie, because we all know she didn't, because that's how the language worked back then. In the same way with during pleasure, it's this sort of flowery language, it's making it sound all fancy, but really it's, no. So yes, it's saying it could be her steward, but we say that because we don't have a letter of Margaret saying, "go and seize that property. I don't want them having it," but that could have happened. But we don't know, or they could have done it in her name without her name. So we always put the little caveat in there.

AT: And then another example that you've mentioned in your work is Philippa of Hainault. Can you tell us her story?

KW: Absolutely. I love talking about Philippa of Hainault. She's actually one of my favourite queens to study. She was married to Edward III in January 1328, and was medieval England's longest reigning consort. She's often overlooked for her mother-in-law, who's very infamous, Isabella of France, who I've talked about before. And as I've told you already about her famous tenure and everything that happens in her lifetime. So everyone focuses on all the drama of Isabella, and they kind of forget about Philippa, and she's a bit overshadowed by her mother-in-law in popular memory.

But in many respects, Philippa was the ideal consort. In fact, she was pretty much the polar opposite of her mother-in-law. She fulfilled all the roles expected of her as queen. She had 13 children, and her grandchildren actually went on to start the famous Wars of the Roses in the following century. And she gave to charity, which was expected of her. She exercised her influence to her husband's benefit, and she ruled as regent in his absence, and he was absent quite a bit, often France fighting for a fair amount of the time. When she is remembered, she's generally remembered for her poor finances. She's been painted at times as a greedy and spend-thrift queen. But what I found in my research is that, and across the 40 years of her time as consort, this wasn't really true. She was very conscious of her income. In the early years of her tenure queen, she had a very limited income because Isabella of France's extreme wealth. And so, when she is granted property, she is very aware of what she is doing with that property. In those first few decades, we can see patterns and changes in the management of her estates in attempts to increase her income. And that's very clear because at first, Edward's trying to subsidise all of her money. And then she's able to actually become quite successful in drawing an income that actually funds what she needs. And so, Edward's financial support essentially stops. And we actually see she's very careful with her expenditure. She's very aware of what income she is bringing in. But that doesn't mean she didn't spend money, because she was expected to live a certain way. Queens were meant to dress a certain way, pay for staffs and

luxuries and gifts and things. And she certainly did not shy away from this. But some historians, so Barbara Lake comes to mind, has actually suggested not only did she spend on these luxuries, but she also supported Edward's fighting in France by giving him money towards it. So it wasn't just her that was spending all this money, Edward was also chucking cash everywhere and celebrating all sorts and living in luxury.

So in the 1350s, Philippa's records reflect the impact of the Black Death, which wiped out a huge part of the English population. The Black Death had a social, political and economic impact, and many noble families were decimated by the losses, not only of their own family members, but also of their tenants. Because of this, we see landlords struggling to collect rent and other landed income. And Philippa, as queen, was no different. Her records from the 1350s show her senior officers chasing down extensive and varied debts in order to recoup losses. Her financial struggles from this continued, and in the early 1360s, despite her husband's attempts to control her debts, the king's and queen's households were merged in order to reduce expenditure. And it is this merger that gives Philippa a bad financial reputation. But there is a lot more to her story than just buying pretty luxuries.

AT: Now, something that comes up a lot of times when I'm talking to academics about women's history is that this is an area that, as far as I know, hasn't been extensively researched in the broader field of historical academia. And while the throughline does often seem to be, to a certain extent, sexism, and the fact that we don't prioritize women's history and we don't think it's important. But are there other reasons that this particular topic hasn't been studied more?

KW: Yeah, I think there's a number of reasons, really. And part of it, I think it'll definitely be based on personal interest in terms of queenship and women's history. I think there's obviously been a rise in the last few decades. But administrative history, not so much. In all honesty, there is definitely a rise at the moment in the last sort of five, six years, maybe slightly longer, actually. But John Collin Parsons famously argues that many people are put off by the idea of administrative history. It lacks the drama and sexiness of fierce battles and political intrigue, to be honest. And a lot of people aren't really interested in going through all of these minute documents with all these numbers and things. I can attest to the fact that it's a bit mind-bending at times, trying to understand what's there as all these squiggles across the page. But actually, if you do take time to go through those documents, there's a lot of drama going on that's hidden behind all of these administrative regulations and numbers. And in reality, I think the biggest setback is the records themselves can be really sparse and patchy and, as I say, quite complicated. The 14th century in England, there was a really great period to look at queens' finances. It's one of the reasons why I picked it. Because the government system has actually become developed at this point. And it avoids the extreme political turmoil of the Wars of the Roses that we see in the 15th century. And there is still a good amount of documentation that survives. But saying that, there's still huge gaps in records. I've got decades that are missing. Some queens have no records that survive at all. You take that back to the 12th century. The government system has not fully developed at this point. And it's even harder to find surviving documents.

But this isn't the case everywhere. I've got a colleague, she works in Spain and Portugal, Lledó

Ruiz Domingo. She looks at the finances of Iberian queens. And she has told me, much to my jealousy, that she has this plethora of records for some Castilian queens in the 14th century. I'm talking every single year, all sorts of things. And the details and things that she's able to get out of these documents. I'm so jealous of, but there are people that are jealous of the records that I have. And so I've been able to find those details. And, "oh, where are you finding this?" And "oh, that just doesn't survive for my queen or in my country that I'm looking at." So there's this huge variation. And it can lead to a lot of unanswered questions.

One of the reasons why I focus on Philippa of Hainault other than the fact that I really enjoy studying her is because where she's queen for 40 years, there is so many more records that survive for her in comparison to other queens in the 14th century in England. So if you've got a queen that's got a much shorter tenure or there's more political strife or from different periods where the government's developing can be much, much harder to study it. But saying that, I mean, there's large gaps in all surviving records, I suppose, in many respects. And scholarships surrounding the economic side of monarchy is on the rise. And as historians, you have to put the pieces of the puzzle together, really sort of look at the records that do survive, the ones that have been found and try and put that all together to try and tell a story to the wider world of what information is there. And that's, I suppose, a big part of the fun for me. I suppose most historians really, trying to put all those pieces together to try and work out what on earth went on and what it all means. And that could be regardless of any focus of research. Sort of from the '80s onwards, we see this real rise in the queenship scholarship. There's some really formative works from the '80s onwards around medieval queenship, European queenship that we can sort of fall back on and the role of the queen and the royal woman and everything. And then it sort of branched from there. And this is just one aspect of that. And there are scholars that have been looking at it sort of sporadically or in more detail across that period. But this economic side of queenship is really sort of rising in the last five to 10 years, I would say.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.