

Abbess Hadewisa (circa 1130)



Hadewisa, created by The Romsey School

Hadewisa, or Hadewis and Hadewidis as it is spelt in different sources, was abbess circa 1130 – only 10 years after the accepted date of the commencement of building work on the present Norman abbey. The abbess or abbesses who presided over the convent during the earlier years, when the new abbey began to rise above the ground are unknown. We don't know whether Hadewisa directly succeeded Abbess Althelitz, who is listed prior to Hadewisa, or whether there were further abbesses who ruled between them.

Hadewisa is referred to as an abbess in 1130 in a grant of a corrody, or allowance in food or money, to the monastic house of St. Denys, Southampton. The original deed is preserved in the Public Record Office, and has a seal attached, of which an illustration is provided. "The seal" is described as "of red wax, about 2 inches in length and 1½ inches in breadth, and represents a female standing in the habit of a nun.



In her right hand she holds a long staff (crozier), and in her left a book which she clasps to her breast." This figure *may* represent the patron saint of Romsey Abbey, St. Ethelfleda. The inscription is simply "**Sigil. S. Marie Romes.**" In this grant, Hadewisa speaks of the Canons of St. Denys as "*fratribus nostris et beneficiorum nostrorum participibus,*" (*of our example to our brethren, and of the benefits of the participants* – according to Google Translate) and grants one a full portion of food and drink such as was provided for a sister. In return the brethren were to pray for the welfare of the living and the repose of the dead in Christ. The

names of two witnesses are attached — Berengarius and Rodbertus.

Another grant of this lady is found in the Edington Register, and relates to the Abbey's property in Wiltshire. The Abbess and Convent lease to a knight named Herlewin a hide of land with pasture formerly enclosed by Alricus next to the monastery of Bradley. Part lay in Essetona (i.e. Steeple Ashton) and part in Ethenduna (i.e. Edington). He is also permitted to rent a further piece of land at ten shillings, and for pannage (the right of feeding pigs or other animals in a wood) of hogs to pay a hog or sixteen pence. The list of witnesses is the most interesting part of the document, as amongst them have survived the names of certain Romsey clergy of this early date "Four presbyters, Robert, John, Roger, Edmund, Gilbert the deacon, Peter, scriptor of St. Albans, Henry clericus, Richard and William Sermonicores, Roger Palmer, Ralf Dispensator, Edwin de Essefalde, Edwin cocus (Cook), William-Armiger of Berengarius, Wlpardus-Armiger of Herlewyn, and clericuli (Clergy in Minor Orders) of Rumesy, Philip, Walter, Osbert, and the other Osbert, Nicholas."

During the next twenty-five years (1130-1155) the dearth of information continues. A Matilda, or Matildis, succeeded Hadewisa, but from what families these ladies came it is impossible to say, the early Abbesses being seldom, if ever, distinguished by the addition of a surname. The grants of the King are the only sources of information, and they tell next to nothing.

Therefore, sadly, we don't know exactly when Hadewisa was elected abbess of Romsey Abbey and in what year she died, only that she was the abbess in 1130. Perhaps, in time, documents may come to light that provide us with a little more information about Abbess Hadewisa.

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