

## Abstract

In medieval England, it was customary for a widow to receive up to one-third of her husband's land upon his death. This thesis analyzes four court cases and two literary works concerning this custom, called dower, from late thirteenth and early fourteenth century England. The analyses of the court cases explore the attitudes both of noble widows and of those practicing law toward dower. The analyses of the literature attempts to place attitudes toward dower in a wider social context. The case analyses demonstrate that some widows actively sought to attain a greater dower than what their husbands had assigned them or what they received by custom. The cases also show that, among the nobility, the decision in dower cases often depended upon political circumstances. Ultimately, one can see dower cases as an expression of the legal fluidity that marked the royal administration of the time.