**‘Divers voyages into farre countries’: Agency in Rose Throckmorton’s Diary**

# **Abstract**

Women played a vital role within mercantile communities in sixteenth century London as social, cultural and economic agents, but there is comparatively little archival material relating to these activities in comparison to their male counterparts, and as they were seldom able to actively participate in trade, the nuances of their activity are easily overlooked. Using the 1610 diary of Rose Lok Hickman Throckmorton as a case study, this article will examine her role within her community and the ways in which she both exerted and subverted agency, interrogating the text’s preoccupations with questions of trade, faith, and gender.

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The year was around 1557, and Rose Hickman was lying on a ‘large featherebed’ in the bottom of an ‘old hulk’ making its way from England to Antwerp.[[1]](#footnote-1) The voyage took five days and nights in stormy and tempestuous weather, and by the end of the journey the ship was in bad enough condition to be retired, ‘never [to] go to sea againe’.[[2]](#footnote-2) Rose brought nothing else with her, all her ‘household stuffe’ stored in friends’ houses in England while she travelled to reunite with her exiled husband. Fifty-three years later, Rose Hickman Throckmorton was sitting in Gainsborough Old Hall in Lincolnshire, a house owned by her eldest surviving son William Hickman, writing an account of those experiences.[[3]](#footnote-3) The house she was sitting in while she wrote her account was testament to her family’s economic and social success following their period in exile. Bought by William in 1596, Gainsborough Old Hall had been fashionably and expensively redecorated by him with oak panelling, tapestries, rich furniture and painted walls ‘with intricate foliage patterns’.[[4]](#footnote-4) No one who saw it could be in any doubt that the Hickman family, despite those difficult years, had since prospered. Rose’s autobiography was part of this project, and she titled it ‘Certaine old stories recorded by an aged gentlewoman a time before her death to be perused by her children and posterity’. The autobiography was wide ranging: it began by recounting a selection of childhood memories, before describing the years spent in London and in exile in Antwerp under the Marian regime, ending with a section briefly describing William’s travels during 1567-8. It is unusual in its comprehensiveness and offers an invaluable view of the ways through which women could exert agency without directly engaging in trade, as well as how this agency could be both limited and enabled by female sociability. This article will use Rose’s autography as a case study through which to interrogate the role sixteenth century women played as economic, religious, and transcultural agents, as well as examining how specific forms of female agency could be used to enable dissent.

Rose Lok Hickman Throckmorton lived during a period of rapid English mercantile expansion, and her family were at the heart of this progress. Her father was a Merchant Adventurer and appears to have been active in the wine or currant trade as well as the export of beer.[[5]](#footnote-5) Her brother Michael was similarly instrumental in driving the expansion of English trade markets in the 1550s as part of the Merchant Adventurers, and later in the 1570s as part of the Muscovy Company.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Merchant Adventurers oversaw the trade of English woollen cloth to northern Europe, and as such were an immensely important mercantile body.[[7]](#footnote-7) The Lok family’s connection to them helped to cement both their wealth and their social status, especially in the latter half of the century as the number of trading companies began to increase rapidly with increased English travel. In the century following the 1550s, the decade the main part of Rose’s autobiography covers, thousands of English merchants would launch and participate in similar ventures across the globe.[[8]](#footnote-8) The economic and commercial development their trade drove was also a cultural and social phenomenon. These merchants formed a closely knit community knitted together by both custom and capital: mercantile work depended on the establishment of common values and practices, while social and familial connections aided the expansion and consolidation of both influence and wealth.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Great attention has been paid within scholarship to the lives of these male merchants, with the vast quantity of letters and logbooks they produced providing detailed insights into their social dynamics and practices.

Women played vital roles within these communities, both socially in connecting disparate communities through marriage, practically as record keepers through modes of literary production, and economically through their material engagement. In these roles, and particularly in their work drawing disparate parts of these networks together through marriage, they acted as ‘go-betweens’, a role which early modern women often played unofficially in matters of social networking.[[10]](#footnote-10) Scholarship which has examined the lives of sixteenth century merchant women has tended to place them within wider analytical frames, using their lives as a means through which to examine concepts such as privacy or the development of mercantile capitalism.[[11]](#footnote-11) Work which does specifically examine women’s economic roles within mercantile communities has focused on their roles as investors in the later seventeenth century, when trading companies were better established.[[12]](#footnote-12) The roles sixteenth century women played within mercantile communities have received less attention, but are vital for understanding the development of England’s mercantile community during its most rapid period of expansion.

It is important here to clarify the remit of these roles. Owing to the patriarchal nature of trading companies, women — other than Royal women — were rarely named on charters in the period and did not necessarily act as merchants in the same way that men did, actively engaging in travel and attending Company meetings. Instead, the term ‘mercantile agents’ is here intended to reflect the wide span of activities within such a community, which both enabled and developed on traditionally ‘male’ activities. Rather than exploring the limitations such women faced, this article intends instead to use Rose’s autobiography as an example of how women could utilise mercantile connections within the community, despite its patriarchal structure, to exert a specific form of agency. In this, I am drawing on Alex Shepard’s conception of contemporary attitudes to work. Her study of the early modern English economy highlights how it relied on both financial and social credit to function: in her words, ‘economic lives were only partially differentiated from social lives’ in large part because the early modern conception of work was of having a living rather than getting one, associating wealth with the possession of goods rather than income.[[13]](#footnote-13) The connections needed to source and manage these goods were therefore a vital part of the economy. The role women played within mercantile communities as asset managers and developers of social credit thus makes it vital to incorporate these activities to expand our understanding of what ‘mercantile agency’ was: not just direct involvement in trade, but also the wider social practices and wealth management that made this activity possible. In some ways Rose is an exception — she was extremely well connected and unusually chose to preserve her account — but repeated references to other women suggests she was not alone in her approach, and she was certainly not the only female traveller in the period.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Her autobiography, however, has been the focus of limited study to date. It was used as the key source of information for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for Rose, and has been the focus of two articles: Maria Dowling and Joy Shakespeare’s ‘Religion and Politics in Mid Tudor England through the Eyes of an English Protestant Woman: The Recollections of Rose Hickman’ (1982) and Jennifer Higginbotham’s ‘The Exile of Rose Hickman Throckmorton’ (2010).[[15]](#footnote-15) In their article, Dowling and Shakespeare used the manuscript as a way to examine religious concerns and everyday practices, while Higginbotham examined how it ‘recast[s] history through the lens of the family rather than the state […] [using] family history to imagine a Protestant future for those who survived the Reformation’.[[16]](#footnote-16) She argues that Rose’s manuscript ‘highlights domestic affective relationships rather than mercantile and exploratory concerns’, but as stated above, recent scholarship on economic and social history suggests that these were inextricable. How Rose experienced and expressed those domestic affective relationships, I argue, is therefore directly relevant to her and her family’s mercantile and religious concerns. culturally through their participation in specifically female communities and practices.

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The autobiographical account is currently preserved in two manuscripts held at the British Library: Add MS 43827 A and B, and Add MS 45027. Add MS 43827 is in two parts: A is the original written by Rose, and B is a copy written by a descendent, Elizabeth Hickman in around 1677. Add MS 45027 is another copy made after 1637 which excludes large sections of the original.[[17]](#footnote-17) Add MS 45027 and 43827 B are incomplete and omit parts of the original narrative, but the former does include an additional verse titled ‘Epitaph upon the death of this old Gentlewoman’, which gives Rose’s death date as 21 November 1613, as well as an account of her children titled ‘The Of[f]spring of this old Gentlewoman this present year 1637’.[[18]](#footnote-18) Though its transcription of the original account is incomplete, it does therefore offer useful information regarding the late family, as well as an insight into how Rose was memorialised. As the original text, and the one with the most material written by Rose, this article will primarily examine the text of Add MS 43827 A, the 1610 account, with Add MS 45027 used to clarify certain details and for later biographical information. This is occasionally necessary as the pages of the original have been damaged, meaning that on some folios the edge of the text is missing, and a few words are unclear. As well as this damage, other evidence suggests that later readers consulting the original manuscript also required clarification on certain points. For example, near the start of the text, Rose wrote that her father was ‘knighted although he was never maior but onelye sherief of Londo[n], and so was never any Londo[n] before him’.[[19]](#footnote-19) The meaning of this is unclear, and in the later copy the sentence is clarified to explain that her father was made a knight, which was an honour that hadn’t been given to any men who had been Sheriff but not Mayor of London before it was given to him.[[20]](#footnote-20) This process of clarification and the existence of multiple seventeenth century copies suggests that the account was well-read by the family: all three manuscripts stayed within the Hickman family until the twentieth century, when they were presented to the British Library by Sir Hickman Beckett Bacon in the 1930s. Rose’s hope that her autobiography would be ‘Perused by her Children and Posterity’ certainly appears to have been successful.

Rose Lok was born in 1526, the daughter of Sir William Lok, London mercer, sheriff, alderman and gentleman usher of the chamber to Henry VIII, and the subject of the autobiography’s opening section, titled ‘of my father’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Her mother is not named, but appears to have been Lok’s second wife Katherine Cooke: the account is clear that her mother, a Protestant woman who used to ‘read to [Rose] out of the […] good books’ became scared to do so after Robert Packington, a mercer who ‘who used to bring english bybles fro[m] beyond sea was slaine w[i]th a gun as he went in the streete’ in 1536.[[22]](#footnote-22) Rose’s account proceeds to describe the death of her mother in childbirth, making the Katherine Lok who died in 1537 most likely her mother.[[23]](#footnote-23) In 1543 when Rose was around seventeen, she married Anthony Hickman, a London merchant like her father.[[24]](#footnote-24) Marrying within the community was standard practice, not least because other mercantile families formed their primary social circle. Rose notes with some pride that ‘My husband before he did marry me was found to be worth 100 li by his books of acco[m]pt yt were exa[m]ined by my fathers appointement’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Her marriage appears to have been dependent on this condition, an intriguing reversal of normal dowry practices. They would have at least seven children who survived to adulthood: six sons and a daughter, born between 1547 and 1563.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The main portion of the autobiography describes her life during the reign of Mary I, titled ‘How my husband and I spent o[r] time in the rayne of Queene Mary’, and is prefaced by Rose emphasising how often she meditates on the ‘mercifull deliverance’ God gave her and her first husband in the ‘dayes of Queene Mary when the cruell papists p[er]secuted the people of god’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Following Mary’s accession to the throne, her husband assisted the Protestant community along with one of her brothers, and as a result both were imprisoned in the Fleet Prison. Rose purchased their freedom with ‘chests of sugar and peeces of velvet to the value of 200 li of thereabouts’, at which point Anthony travelled to Antwerp — according to Rose, ‘to drive away the wicked dayes’.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Rose, who was pregnant, went to Oxford to stay in a house near the city. After giving birth she asked for advice from Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, imprisoned in Oxford at the time, and after receiving condemnation from them for not travelling out of England while she could, consented to her child being baptised ‘by a popish priest’. To ‘avoide the popish stuff’ as far as possible, she secretly exchanged the salt intended for use in a Catholic baptism with sugar. Following this, she moved to Antwerp in the bottom of a hulk on a featherbed. Rose’s following brief account of life in Antwerp offers particularly details on her navigation of religious and social practices surrounding the practicing of her faith in another country. This section of the manuscript concludes with her discovery of Mary’s death and her return to England, ending on a triumphant note with her assertion that ‘In all wch time I never was present at any of the popish masses, or any other of their idolatrous service[s]’.

The original manuscript also contains a description of her son William’s travels and his own miraculous ‘deliverances’. Rose begins this section by recounting various childhood incidents, including a bout of food poisoning and an incident where he fell off a roof, before detailing the dangers he faced as an adult. When he was eighteen or nineteen, she wrote, ‘old Mr Randoll [Thomas Randolph] a good friend of his fathers was to go as Lord Embassador from or late Queene Elizabeth to the Empror of Russia’.[[29]](#footnote-29) Randolph, like the Hickmans, had been a Marian exile. Anthony Hickman, using this connection, sent their son with him on the 1568-9 embassy so that ‘he might see some fashions in the worlde’. After the ship had departed, the crew stopped off at the coast to walk before returning to the ship, and in the process accidentally left William behind. He walked along the coastline to catch up with them, and once he had returned to the ship they hired some ‘cuntrye mares’ to ride to Moscow, whereupon everyone except William became ill — an occasion Rose interprets as a sign of divine favour. On this, the autobiography abruptly ends.

Five years later, Antony Hickman died and Rose remarried Simon Throckmorton, who died in 1585. Her second husband makes little appearance in the autobiography: though she refers to herself as ‘Rose Throckmorton widow late wife of Simon Throckmorton Esq and first ye wife of Anthony Hickma[n] a mercn[t] of London’ in the opening, after this she makes no reference to her second husband.[[30]](#footnote-30) This is partly explained by its temporal setting, which only covers the years of her first marriage, but other evidence suggests that this failure to reference her second marriage held greater significance. There is a portrait of Rose currently held at Gainsborough Old Hall, dated December 27 1596: she was 70 when it was painted, and it is the only known extant contemporary image of her.[[31]](#footnote-31) The painting depicts Rose in a stark black outfit, with the exception of a well starched white ruff, and completely free of jewellery or other ornamentation. Though clearly wealthy, her choice of dress and its simplicity exemplifies her strict Protestant faith.

There are three textual annotations on the painting, all made at different periods and each of which signals the portrait’s shifting role within a wider body of family material. The first, at the top, gives Rose’s age and the date of the portrait’s completion; the second by her face appears to be slightly later and adds context reading ‘Rose Daughter to Sr W[illia]m Lock K[nigh]t. Married to Anthony Hickman’, and the third at the bottom repeats this identification with the abbreviations expanded. There is no reference in any of these captions to her second husband, likely as the portrait was intended as part of a Hickman family set: it was painted around the same time that William bought Gainsborough Old Hall and matched a similar portrait of him made earlier that year. Both portraits hang together in the Hall today, along with later ones of the Hickman family. The annotations on William’s portrait show that the family were invested in cementing themselves as wealthy and titled landowners: the caption reads ‘S[ir] W[illia]m Hickman K[nigh]t’, and the family coat of arms is depicted behind him.[[32]](#footnote-32) The later annotations on the portrait of Rose similarly show her place within family history, with her role as the family’s originating matriarch constantly being re-inscribed for new audiences. Her autobiography, like the portraits, is therefore part of a wider project of familial legacy building, with Rose using her authorial agency to cement her place in family history for ‘posterity’.

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Rose’s autobiography documents a dramatic period in her life. It covers over thirty years of family history and in its comprehensiveness provides a level of personal detail that would not have otherwise been preserved, making it an invaluable source for scholarship. Her focus throughout remains centred on the survival of her family, and their wealth — both spiritual and economic — is the factor consistently shown as having enabled this survival. Though the manuscript begins by establishing her father’s connections and her husband plays a significant role throughout, the primary actions of the text were all undertaken by Rose. Her own agency as a participant in economic, crypto-Protestant, and female networks, as well as her role as the text’s creator, is thus at the heart of the action.

Rose Lok’s value as an economic agent was clearly recognised by her contemporaries, and her autobiography gives a fascinating and useful account of how mercantile communities contracted and negotiated their personal relationships. As mentioned above, her description of her engagement to Anthony Hickman makes it clear that her father was involved in checking his books before the marriage, apparently to ensure that he was financially stable enough to join the mercantile heavyweights of the Lok family. Once this was confirmed and the pair were married, her husband’s wealth enabled him to join them both socially and in their trade as a ‘great dealer in the trade of a merch[an]t ventourr’.[[33]](#footnote-33) Anthony became a joint partner with her eldest brother Thomas, and they made their familial links an integral part of their economic practices, building a ‘goodly ship’ at their own cost and naming it ‘the Mary Rose being the names of us their wives’.[[34]](#footnote-34) Though not active as merchants themselves, the naming of the ship links the economic practices of the husbands with the social credit of their wives. Around ninety percent of transactions were carried out on credit in the period, and with goods functioning as ‘cash equivalents, repositories of wealth, and the security for credit’, a vital aspect of women’s work was asset management.[[35]](#footnote-35) Ships, as both moveable property in themselves and the containers for further items, may appear to lie solely within the remit of male mercantile activity, but the dual naming of the Hickman-Lok ship reflects the economic role their wives played in managing their wealth, as well as emphasising the familial links to the wider social network gained through their marriages.

The vital role that Rose played as an asset manager becomes evident when she describes the years during her husband’s imprisonment in London under the Marian regime when their community and its social practices were disrupted. During this period she used her family’s wealth, gained partly through those journeys on the Mary Rose, to purchase her husband’s freedom. Using his connections to a ‘Lord of Barrowe’ from the ‘lowe countries’ who was a ‘great sutor’ to her husband for his trade, as well as the ‘lord treasurors favor’, she ensured Anthony and her brother Thomas’s release from the Fleet prison after ‘long imprisonment’.[[36]](#footnote-36) The Lord Treasurer’s favour, she notes, ‘we purchased with chests of sugar and peeces of velvet to the value of 200 li of thereabouts’. Her partner in this activity may have been one of her older brothers — possibly Henry, as Michael was travelling abroad during Mary’s reign — or it may have been her sister-in-law and fellow ship-dedicatee, Thomas’s wife Mary, keen to ensure her own husband’s release. It is clear though that whoever the partner, Rose was the primary instigator, using her husband’s connections and leveraging their living — the luxury goods gained through those relationships — to buy his freedom while promising further trade to the Low Countries. This is not the only occasion within Rose’s text when she used wealthy goods for such a purpose. As well as ensuring her brother and Anthony’s release and the latter’s escape to Antwerp, Rose would also use sugar as a substitute for salt when forced to baptise her child in the Catholic rite in Oxford, this time using her family’s tradeable goods to purchase spiritual, rather than physical freedom.[[37]](#footnote-37) While the traditionally male side of the family’s economic activity was curtailed, Rose was still able to bargain with the movable goods that formed their livelihood, demonstrating the importance of her agency as an economic actor.

As well as possessing a significant degree of economic influence, the Hickmans’ position within their community was closely connected to their faith. On each occasion that Rose made a reference to their economic wealth in her text she was careful to balance it by emphasising that their spiritual salvation was of higher value. When describing her husband’s ship the ‘Mary Rose’, for example, she wrote that though it ‘plesaed God to blese & prosper well their adventures and though thereby their riches did increase […] [they] learned not to trust in uncertaine riches but in the living lord who giveth abundantly’.[[38]](#footnote-38) As members of a Protestant family who used their mercantile wealth to escape the Catholic Marian regime, for the Hickmans faith was an inextricable of daily life. Rose’s faith linked her economic and social roles within the community and was a key motivation for writing the autobiography. She made a point of emphasising her family’s place in Protestant history, framing her writing as a means through which this history would be preserved and herself as the only person able to preserve it. She began the manuscript by recounting a story taken from ‘Hollinshed[’]s chronicle’ which describes her father intervening to take down a ‘curse […] set up in the town of Dunkirke’ sent by the pope at ‘the su[i]te of the ladye Katherine dowager’.[[39]](#footnote-39) Her choice to begin the autobiography with an account that predates her own birth serves to establish her family’s place within not just English Protestant history, but recorded and printed history. It is also notable that it was her father’s trading practices that enabled him to prove his adherence to the true faith and set a model for his children, while her mother similarly had English copies of the Gospel ‘sent privately to her by my father[’]s facto[r] fro[m] beyond seas’, enacting the same process within the home.[[40]](#footnote-40)

The Holinshed record was framed by Rose as a as significant impetus for her autobiographical recording: she followed the reference by writing that ‘reading this of my father [I] have thought [it] good to leave to my children this addition to it’.[[41]](#footnote-41) In composing her account and preserving her own memories, Rose was consciously adding to an existing record, layering her own experiences and interpretations onto recorded — and male authored — history. This process of layering is demonstrated again on the following page, where Rose continued that ‘I remember I have heard my father say that […] Queene Anne Boloin yt was mother to o[r] late Queene Elizabeth caused him to get her ye gospels and epistles written in p[ar]chm[ent] in French together with the psalms’.[[42]](#footnote-42) With this anecdote Rose placed her father at the heart of the English Reformation, connecting him to two of its most important figures. The Lok/Hickman family are therefore positioned through Rose’s memorials as pivotal agents in English religious history and Rose, as the one who the story depends on, becomes the most important figure in the historical chain, solely responsible for the preservation of this history.

These references to printed works frame the autobiography as an addition to ‘established’ history, placing it within a wider history of Protestant material. They also signal the autobiography’s existence as a work within its own genre — in this case, life-writing. The autobiography is unusual within its genre: Sarah Ross, in her analysis of the influence of reading on early modern women’s life writing, considered that it ‘almost always eludes the category of autobiography’, which was a later genre defined by ‘the narrative creation of a unified personality’.[[43]](#footnote-43) Rose’s account, which expresses a very well-defined unified personality, is clearly an exception. In other ways though, the account more clearly conforms to expectations of ‘self-writing’ as a generically fluid form emerging from ‘intersect[ion] and engage[ment] with *other* genres’, where the author uses these formal and generic structures to constitute a version of ‘herself’.[[44]](#footnote-44) Rose was working within a growing movement of sixteenth and later seventeenth century Englishwomen producing and circulating such life writings. These texts took many forms, including the explicitly autobiographical and the less obviously so, such as cookbooks and religious treatises, but all played an important role in women’s understanding and articulation of female identity.[[45]](#footnote-45) Though these texts may seem self-concerned, as Michelle Dowd and Julie Eckerle have argued their experimentation with genre in fact represents both their connections to the larger textual world and the place of women within these networks.[[46]](#footnote-46) Similar examples to Rose’s autobiography include the Diary of Alice Thornton, which contains more quotidian detail but is generically similar: a ‘deliverance memoir’, it reflects the ‘spiritual and domestic life of an early modern woman’.[[47]](#footnote-47) Anne Clifford took a similar approach in her diary, which placed her within a wider familial dynasty while demonstrating a keen awareness of capital.[[48]](#footnote-48) Both Thornton and Clifford, like Rose, used their narratives of life-writing to offer an insight into family dynamics and priorities, centering their perspective as matriarchal figures. Unlike theirs, however, Rose’s autobiography was written long after the events with no indication that she was referring to an earlier diary, and it focuses on a period of exile and its author’s time as a cultural agent within a foreign, rather than solely domestic space.

Having meditated often on her family’s salvation, Rose wrote that she hoped by recording their history she would enable future generations to do the same. Religion was an important part of Rose’s social position and agency throughout her life. As detailed above, she used the family’s earlier connections to Protestant figures to situate herself as an author and life-writer, ‘making history’. The references also served to place her family within contemporary networks, foregrounding her personal connections to some of the most well-known early modern English Protestants — and, often, their indebtedness to her. While describing events during the beginning of Mary’s reign, Rose recounts occasions where ‘Byshop Hooper, mr Foxe Mr Knoxe and divers other godly preachers’ were given entertainment by her husband and brother.[[49]](#footnote-49) Though she writes that her husband and brother did so ‘to use and imploy their substance [gained through trade] to the glory of god and good of his church’, she also notes that ‘if [the preachers] were living on earth [they] […] would not forget to declare what kind usage and bounty they have found at the hands of my good husband’.[[50]](#footnote-50) Her reference to ‘mr Foxe’ in particular — assumedly John Foxe, author of *Actes and Monuments* (London, first edition 1563) — is another textual link to printed Protestant history, and again one reliant on Rose’s own memory rather than external validation. This serves a similar purpose to the reference to Holinshed, as examined above, which enabled Rose to frame her memories within a printed record and increase their authority by proxy

Further on in the text, after having given birth near Oxford, Rose records speaking with three of the most important figures in Anglican historiography and martyrology: Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer. In the original manuscript they are specified only as ‘ye byshops (who were then and there in prison [in Oxford] and did afterwards suffer martirdome there)’.[[51]](#footnote-51) In the later copy of the manuscript this was expanded to include their names, suggesting that later family members were keen to make this connection explicit. Though Rose doesn’t state it explicitly, her stay near Oxford is another example of her place within the social network of English Protestants. She writes that she stayed in a ‘gentlemans house yt was a lodge and stood farre of[f] from any church or towne (the name whereof was Chilswelll)’.[[52]](#footnote-52) Chilswell Valley, near modern-day Botley on the outskirts of Oxford, was at the time home to a manor owned by Henry Norris.[[53]](#footnote-53) Norris’s father had been executed after being accused of adultery with Anne Boleyn, and had placed his son with a refugee evangelical teacher as a child, so they would have been sympathetic to Rose’s plight.[[54]](#footnote-54) Though Rose doesn’t include his name, Norris’s is the most likely house she would have stayed in.

As well as these personal connections, Rose’s maternal family were also connected to important figures within Protestant networks. As well as making references to her family’s links to Holinshed, Rose is keen to make her reader aware of their link to another English history: *Principal Navigations. Principal Navigations* is extremely comprehensive — the second edition totalled three volumes and more than 1.75 million words — and it offers an unrivalled history of English trade and travel at the end of the sixteenth century. Its editor Richard Hakluyt was a preacher in the Church of England as well as a geographer, holding positions throughout his life across England and, for a period in the 1580s, in Paris. Hakluyt was close to the Lok family and Rose’s brother Michael in particular: the latter assisted Hakluyt with the preparation of his first printed work *Divers Voyages* (1581) and Hakluyt referred to him as ‘a man for his knowledge in divers languages & especially in Cosmographie, able to doe his country good’.[[55]](#footnote-55) When Rose referenced Hakluyt in her own work it was in the context of this familial relationship, proudly noting that her brother and Anthony:

had some ships of their owne and did make divers voyages into farre countries: some of which voyages were of such note and fame as they are spetially recorded by mr Richard Hackliut in his second printed volume of English voyages to the south and southeast p[ar]ts of the world. (Add MS 43827 A, fols. 6v-7r)

Unlike her earlier reference to Holinshed, Rose specifically differentiated this reference by writing ‘Richard Hackluit’ in a different hand to the rest of the manuscript. This is the only occasion where she did so, creating a formal difference which deliberately highlights the connection. Hakluyt’s work would become a key part of British imperial historiography, and Rose’s foregrounding of her family’s link to the history of English travel would further serve to situate their lives within this history, while emphasising their experience and expertise.

As well as these male relationships, the women of her maternal family were also connected to Protestant figures in their own right. The most well-known example is her sister-in-law, Anne Vaughan Lok. The daughter of a Merchant Adventurer herself, Anne married within the community to Rose’s brother Henry, her father’s neighbour in Cheapside.[[56]](#footnote-56) Like Rose, she was also a committed Protestant from a young age following the example of her parents. In late 1552 she was first connected to John Knox, the Scottish reformer, and they began a correspondence which continued throughout the decade. In 1557 she even joined him in exile in Geneva, with her husband remaining in London.[[57]](#footnote-57) Rose was also connected to Knox: the earliest of his known surviving letters to Anne in 1556 was also addressed to her, referring to them as ‘dearlie belovit sistersis in our Saviour Jesus Chryst’ and thanking them for their ‘speciall care over me, as the mother useth […] over hir natural chyld’.[[58]](#footnote-58) Though Rose does not appear again in Knox’s letters and Anne’s replies have been lost, the connection clearly continued, as her son Eleazer Hickman born in 1562 appears to have been named after Knox’s eldest son.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Rose’s connection to this community continued during her exile in Antwerp. It also created difficulties for the Hickmans as a Protestant couple within a Catholic space: Rose writes of her husband’s moral struggles upon being compelled to attend the ‘chapel for the English merchants’ on solemn feast days, though she herself avoided attending and Governor, though a ‘papist […] was no persecutor nor cruell papist’, and granted him as much leeway as possible.[[60]](#footnote-60) Her real test came when she gave birth. Because of the ‘hatred that the inhabitants there do beare to the anabaptises’, the magistrates customarily ‘enter[ed] at midnight into houses where any children were suspected to be kept unbaptised, and if [they] found any such […] put ym in a sack, and cast them into the water and so drown[ed] ym’.[[61]](#footnote-61) To avoid her child meeting this fate without being forced to resort to a second Catholic baptism, Rose used her knowledge of local customs to play a trick on her neighbours. She described this in her autobiography, noting that ‘it is the custom there to hang at the streete doore where a woman lyest in a little peece of lawn’. [[62]](#footnote-62) As their house opened into two streets, she simply hung a piece of lawn from either side so that the neighbours on either side would assume, having not seen the child leave for baptism, that it had been taken out from the other side.[[63]](#footnote-63) She then, ‘by ye helpe of some goodly weomen’ procured a secret Protestant baptism. Her subterfuge represents a specifically female form of agency. Just as merchants were incorporated into one body corporate, the ‘rituals of childbirth gathered together assemblies of women with membership in a different kind of community’, with the significance of the birth extending beyond the bounds of the household.[[64]](#footnote-64) Assumedly she had been assisted during the birth by midwives and other local women, but when it came to the religious element of these rituals she used her knowledge of local practices to enable her dissent, relying on their belief in turn that she was a law abiding and respectable member of the community of women. As shown in Eleanor Hubbard’s study of early modern women and childbirth in London, it was a female domain which ‘took precedence over the usual household hierarchy’: accordingly, it was Rose who took the initiative to hang the fabric from both windows and, in so doing, hide a break with the social contract.[[65]](#footnote-65)

This approach to occupying transnational positions within foreign countries when faced with religious danger was not solely restricted to Protestant women contemporarily. Sixty years later, the Spanish Catholic Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza travelled to London in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot as part of an evangelical *misión de Inglaterra* (English Mission). When in London, she attempted to ‘pass as an Englishwoman’, learning English from two English women who did not speak Spanish, and wearing English fashions.[[66]](#footnote-66) Only once she felt comfortable passing as an English woman did Carvajal pursue her mission proper, establishing a religious order in Spitalfields where ‘*soldados doncellas* (warrior maidens) provided spiritual and logistical support to the members of underground Catholic networks’.[[67]](#footnote-67) Both Rose and Carvajal, in their approaches to negotiating transcultural positions while staying true to their faith, demonstrate the possibilities of subversively operating outside and around prescribed social, gender and national boundaries.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Foreign spaces thus pose as much of a threat to the English figures in the autobiography as they provide possibilities for trade and discovery. There is a specific textual formula, used throughout the first half of the autobiography, which recognises this tension: ‘beyond sea’. It first appears when Rose describes her father travelling to fetch Anne Boleyn prayer books, ‘when he was a young m[er]chant and used to go beyond sea’.[[69]](#footnote-69) It then recurs throughout the text at points where travel is religiously motivated: for example, when her father’s factor brought back prayer books for her mother ‘fro[m] beyond seas’, when describing the merchant ‘Paginton who used to bring english bybles fro[m] beyond sea’, and when her husband, during Mary’s reign, assisted ‘preachers [and] other good christians (that were […] beyond seas)’.[[70]](#footnote-70) As a textual formula which implies the existence of a space ‘beyond [the] sea’, it connects the text’s concerns with religion and geographic movement, framing the space ‘beyond seas’ as one which provides salvation and succour – either spiritually, in the case of the Bibles and prayer books, or physically, in the case of the Christians in exile. It is also the space where the economic connections made in London came to fruition, with goods being brought back to be managed and add to the family’s wealth. The sea makes its final appearance as the ‘stormy and tempesatous [sic]’ trial which Rose undergoes to reach Antwerp, and then is not referenced again as by moving to Antwerp, Rose had herself moved to occupy a space ‘beyond seas’. With this movement she takes the place of these goods, transported in a ship to reach a space providing limited religious succour. In the later section of the original manuscript where Rose described her son’s travels, he would also be faced with similar trials. His accidental abandonment on the coastline of Russia became a semi-spiritual journey, with him walking ‘15 miles in the desert’ to re-join the crew, meeting an old man (a ‘stranger’) along the way who had given him directions ‘by making figures’. The family’s spiritual ordeals may not have been over after their return from Antwerp, but if their faith continued, Rose implied, they would continue to be saved.

Rose’s autobiography does not only reflect a strong and unified sense of self, but also records a detailed and personal history of her immediate family. In creating this record, Rose thus ensured the survival of her own positionality within her familial network both past and present. The later manuscript copy of the autobiography, for example, demonstrates how quickly family history could pass out of memory. In the later list of what happened to her children after her death, written in 1637, when detailing the life of Rose’s only surviving daughter Mary it lists her first husband as ‘— Agmonsham’.[[71]](#footnote-71) According to their marriage record his first name was John, and his surname was properly spelt Amondsham.[[72]](#footnote-72) This typographical error suggests that his surname had been passed down through oral memory, and that in the process his first name had been forgotten. As Mary and all of her siblings were dead by 1637, the marriage had been childless, and she had remarried after his death, there was no one alive within the Hickman family who would have remembered from first-hand experience.

Similarly, during the period covered by Rose’s autobiography, she records that she gave birth to two children, but none of the children recorded in the 1637 list were born during this period. The corresponding gap in extant baptismal records between Walter in 1552 and Anthony in 1560 can be accounted for by the fact that children born in this period would have been baptised in Oxford and Antwerp respectively, but that there is no record in the family history even of their existence is surprising. There is also no obvious record of their burial. There is a record of an Anthony Hickman whose father was Anthony Hickman being buried at St Olave’s — the same church where the other Hickman children were baptised — but this was in 1556, by which time Rose was either in Oxford or Antwerp, and her autobiography makes no record of a trip to London.[[73]](#footnote-73) Either the stories of these births and baptisms were fictional, or the children died before they reached adulthood, and so were not included in the 1637 list. It seems unlikely, considering the seriousness with which she took her faith, that Rose would lie about something as significant as baptism, but her elder children — William, Henry, and Anthony — are notably also missing from the autobiography. Rose was deliberately crafting her narrative to create both a deliberate affective response and a narrative of divine salvation: whenever the family is threatened, it is usually either Rose’s intelligence or their capital which ensures salvation, both of which are continually attributed to God. Though deaths of her two children would not have been as straightforwardly exemplary of triumph as Rose’s rescue of her husband and escape from England, they would have fit into a narrative of salvation. It may be that the deaths of these children were too painful to recount and so Rose omitted them so as not to relive them: it may also be that the autobiography’s primary focus was intended to rest on her and her husband, and so they were omitted to keep the narrative focused. In either case, the omission demonstrates another form of authorial agency on her part: the ability to decide what was not recorded, as well as what was. Though the autobiography may appear comprehensive in its detail, it is a constructed text and the degree of its fictionality cannot easily be ascertained.

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Rose Lok Hickman Throckmorton’s autobiography is an invaluable source for historians of early modern mercantile communities, as well as scholars of life-writing and autobiography. The text clearly demonstrates Rose’s importance within her contemporary social network, both culturally and economically, and in its retelling of history and references to significant contemporary figures connects her family to wider English history to position them as pivotal figures in the nation’s history. By creating the autobiography, preserving her memories, and connecting them to printed history through these textual references, Rose ensured that her influence and legacy would persist even after her death. Though the autobiography is unusually singular and consistent in its narratorial voice, it also demonstrates the ways in which ‘self-writing’ could be a generically fluid form emerging from engagement with multiple genres. In Rose’s case, her autobiography draws from religious meditations, geographical writings, and historical chronicles, bringing these disparate influences together just as Rose herself moved within different spaces and networks, an agent in her own right.

1. London, British Library (BL), Add MS 43827 A, fols. 15r-15v. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rose had remarried since and was known from then on as Rose Throckmorton. Because this article examines both periods, she will be referred to as ‘Rose’ throughout. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Phillip G. Lindley, *Gainsborough Old Hall*, Occasional Papers in Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, 8 (Lincoln: Society of Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, 1991), p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. James McDermott, ‘Lok, Sir William (1480–1550)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [*ODNB*] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16951>>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. James McDermott, ‘Lok, Michael (c. 1532–1620x22)’, *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16950>>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Edmond Smith, *Merchants: The Community That Shaped England’s Trade and Empire, 1550-1650* (London: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Nandini Das and others, ‘Broker’, in *Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), pp. 51–56 (p. 55). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For example, Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Martha Howell, ‘Gender in the Transition to Merchant Capitalism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also, within this collection, Wiesner Hanks’ discussion of critical attitudes towards women’s work. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For example, Misha Ewen, ‘Women Investors and the Virginia Company in the Early Seventeenth Century’, *The Historical Journal*, 2019, 1–22 and Aske Laursen Brock and Misha Ewen, ‘Women’s Public Lives: Navigating the East India Company, Parliament and Courts in Early Modern England’, *Gender & History*, 33.1 (2021), 3–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A. Shepard, ‘Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy’, *History Workshop Journal*, 79.1 (2015), 1–24 (p. 6, 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For more information on women’s travelling practices in the period, see Higgins in this collection on the nature and variety of female travel. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Maria Dowling and Joy Shakespeare, ‘Religion and Politics in Mid Tudor England through the Eyes of an English Protestant Woman: The Recollections of Rose Hickman’, *Historical Research*, 55.131 (1982), 94–102; Jennifer Higginbotham, ‘The Exile of Rose Hickman Throckmorton’, *Reformation*, 15.1 (2010), 99–114. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Higginbotham, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Dowling and Shakespeare, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. BL, Add MS 45027, fols. 7r-8v. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Add MS 43827 A, fol. 3r. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Add MS 45027., fol. 2r. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ben Lowe, ‘Throckmorton [Née Lok; Other Married Name Hickman], Rose (1526–1613)’, *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/67979>>; Add MS 43827 A, fol. 2r. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., fol. 3r. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. ‘Catharine Cooke Locke (Unknown-1537)’, *Find a Grave*, 2014 <<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/138594481/catharine-locke>> [accessed 8 June 2022]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. There are two records of a marriage between Rose Lock and Anthony Hickman for 1543; one puts their wedding in August (London, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), P69/MRY7/A/002/MS04997), and the other in November (LMA, P69/MRY7/A/001/MS04996). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Add MS 43827 A., fol. 6v. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The full list is offered in Add MS 45027, fols. 7v-8r. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Add MS 43827 A., fol. 6r. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., fol. 13v. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., fols. 21r-22v. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., fol. 2v. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Unknown, *Rose Hickman (1526–1596), Daughter of Sir William Lock, Wife of Anthony Hickman*, 1596, Gainsborough Old Hall. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Unknown, *Sir William Hickman (d.1625), Kt*, 1596, Gainsborough Old Hall. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Add MS 43827 A., fol. 6v. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., fol. 7r. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Shepard, ‘Crediting’, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Add MS 43827 A., fols. 13r-13v. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., fol. 14r. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., fol. 7r. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., fol 2r. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., fols. 3v-4r. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., fol. 2v. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., fols. 3r-3v. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Sarah C. E. Ross, ‘“Like Penelope, Always Employed”: Reading, Life-Writing, and the Early Modern Female Self in Katherine Austen’s Book M’, *Literature Compass*, 9.4 (2012), 306–16 (p. 306). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle, ‘Introduction’, in *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 1–15 (pp. 1-3). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid., p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., pp. 10-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Alice Thornton, *My First Booke of My Life*, ed. by Raymond A. Anselment (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Anne Clifford, *Anne Clifford’s Autobiographical Writing, 1590-1676*, ed. by Jessica L. Malay (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Add MS 43827 A., fol 8r. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., fols. 8r-8v. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid., fols. 13v-14r. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid., fol. 13v. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Kew, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), ‘C 3/133/22, Short Title: Norreys v Druerye’, 1558;

    TNA, ‘D/EX 212/T/1, Yattendon, Cumnor, Midgham, Ufton Nervet, and Weston-on-the-Green (Co. Oxon.)’, 1613. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. ‘Norris [Norreys], Henry, First Baron Norris (c. 1525–1601)’, *ODNB* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20272>>; E. W. Ives, ‘Norris, Henry (b. before 1500, d. 1536)’, *ODNB Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20271>>. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Richard Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America and the Islands Adjacent*, ed. by John Winter Jones (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1850), p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Patrick Collinson, ‘Locke [Née Vaughan; Other Married Names Dering, Prowse], Anne (c. 1530–1590x1607)’, *ODNB* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/69054>>. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. John Knox, ‘XXIX. TO MISTRESS LOCKE AND MISTRESS HICKMAN, MERCHANDIS WYFFIS IN LONDOUN.’, in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. by David Laing, 6 vols (Edinburgh: J. Thin, 1895), iv, 219–22. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. LMA, P69/OLA2/A/002/MS04400/001. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Add MS 43827 A. fols. 16r-17r. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., fol. 17r. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid., fols. 17r-17v. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Eleanor Hubbard, *City Women: Money, Sex, and the Social Order in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 157-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. João Vicente Melo, ‘Luisa De Carvajal y Mendoza (1566–1614)’, in *Lives in Transit in Early Modern England: Identity and Belonging*, ed. by Nandini Das (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), pp. 128–33 (pp. 130-1). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. The navigation of faith around transnational boundaries was not limited to Christian women: for discussion of the difficulties that Muslim women faced when making similar journeys, see Andrea’s article in this collection. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Add MS 43827 A, fol. 3r. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., fols. 4r, 9v. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid., fol. 8v. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. LMA, P69/OLA2/A/002/MS04400/001. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. LMA, P69/OLA2/A/002/MS04400/001. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)