The Isle of Man is an island situated in the Irish Sea at the geographical center of the British Isles. During the Middle Ages, the Isle of Man, which was only two hundred and twenty-two square miles, surprisingly was the seat of an important Viking kingdom that controlled and patrolled the Irish Sea and Hebrides. Rushen Abbey, a Savigniac monastery, was founded in 1134 near Ballasalla, in the parish of Malew, in the southeast of the Isle of Man.

This dissertation focuses on the influence that Rushen Abbey exerted on ecclesiastical institutions and secular personas within the area of the Irish Sea and examines the external dignitaries, which, in turn, influenced the abbey. Ecclesiastical issues include the relationship between Rushen and its mother-house, Furness in Cumbria; the associations among monasteries situated in the Irish Sea region (Furness, Iona, Whithorn, Holmcultram, Inch, and Gray); the consequences of Rushen and Furness’ Savigniac heritage after the Congregation had been incorporated in 1147 into the Cistercian Order; and the abbey’s influence on the bishopric of the Isles. Secular issues to be explored include the importance of Rushen Abbey to the magnates and nobles in the
Irish Sea region in social, political, as well as, economical relations, particularly to the king of the Isles. Finally, this dissertation will examine the ways in which both Rushen and its motherhouse, Furness Abbey, thrived in frontier regions, and secured a place as the predominant religious influence on the Isle of Man.