

NOTES FROM THORNHAM

My illustration shows the fine seal matrix discovered in a field near Thornham Parva church in 2001. It was found by Gilbert Burroughs when metal detecting with a group of volunteer archaeologists led by the late Mike Hardy. Over several years they carried out a survey of the Thornham Estate by field walking, metal detecting and excavating.

The inscription reads 'S. DECANATUS DE HARTISMERE', that is, 'Seal of the Deanery of Hartismere', proving the matrix was used for impressing into wax seals on official documents of the Deanery.

Only an inch long, the playful engraving shows the hart or deer and the waves of the mere. Dating from about 1300, it is a flat bronze oval with a raised ridge on the back pierced with a hole for a cord. Did the cord break one day? If so, how many hours searching failed to find this little object so long ago. A piece of great good fortune that it turned up centuries later, still in perfect condition.

The Deanery and Hundred of Hartismere both covered the area between Palgrave and Mendlesham and Westhorpe and Occold. We are pretty much in the middle. The boundaries, set before Domesday, are Anglo Saxon or perhaps earlier and based on Roman estates or Iron Age tribes. Hundreds were usually centred on and named after an open air meeting place, often central and near a highway. Ours may have been a pond near us, or even Diss Mere.

The Deanery of Hartismere is an ecclesiastical group of what was 32 parishes but is now reduced in size. Based on a tenth of a diocese it has several times changed between dioceses until now it is part of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

The administrative Hundred of Hartismere occupied the same area but for that purpose it was based on 100 farms and was a sub-division of the county. It was the area of our Rural District Council until that was bundled with others to form Mid Suffolk in 1974. Interestingly Babergh with which we are now coupled was a surviving hundred with its original meeting place at the burgh or mound of Babba near Sudbury.



✳ You can read all my Notes from Thornham on www.thornhams.org.
Keep well and please let me know about your research. Stephen Schwarz