

A NORFOLK HUNDRED SEAL MATRIX RECENTLY FOUND IN KENT

by Steven Ashley and Andrew Rogerson

A seal matrix of the hundred of South Greenhoe was found during 1996 at the foot of a rose bush in Detling, Kent by Mrs M.A. Gillet whilst gardening, and brought to the attention of the authors through the good offices of Claire Mason of Maidstone Museum.

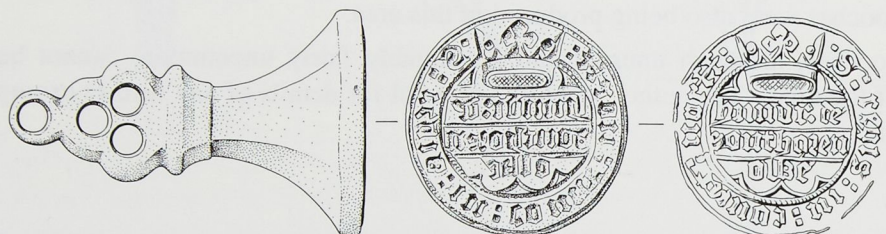


Fig.1

Copper alloy seal matrix found in Kent. Scale 1:1

The seal is made of copper alloy with a high lead content. It has a dull silvery surface and weighs 42.46g. On the reverse a conical handle of hexagonal section rises to a simple collared moulding, and ends in a trefoil lobe pierced by four circular holes and topped by a circular loop. Although only a small area of gilding survives at the base of the lobe, the object does not appear to be very worn.

The obverse, within a cusped border and beneath a crown, is inscribed in three lines:

hundr:de / southgren / owe

The surrounding legend reads:

S:regis:in:comit norff:

In translation this reads: The hundred of South Greenhoe. The seal of the king in the county of Norfolk (Fig.1).

This object was produced to enforce the provisions of the Statute of Labourers which was passed by a Parliament held at Cambridge in September 1388. This law, one of a series of oppressive statutes which had begun in 1351, attempted to control the wage-earning classes in the aftermath of the Peasants' Revolt (Farmer 1991, 486-7; Fryde 1996, 118). As part of a seigneurial backlash against the peasantry it fixed labourers' wage levels, and in order to combat growing population mobility (Fryde and Fryde 1991, 788-91), made it an offence for servile people to depart from a hundred, rape, wapentake, city or borough without a letter bearing the king's seal and stating reasons for departure and date of return. Even those going on pilgrimage were required to carry such a warrant. The seal was to bear the name of the hundred *etc.* and the matrix was to be kept by a 'good man' of that administrative unit (for an eloquent and colourful description of this medieval form of pass law see Walford and Way 1854, 378-80; for the full text see S.R. 1816, 55-8).

Several other seal matrices of East Anglian hundreds have been published. A rather coarse example, of Flegg, Norfolk, is held in the collections of Norwich Castle Museum, Acc.

no.174.76.94 (*Norfolk Archaeol.* 1 (1847), 368 with illustration; Palmer 1872, 174 with illustration; Rye 1909, 97 no.910). Two matrices in the British Museum are very close in design and lettering to the South Greenhoe piece: South Erpingham, Norfolk (Tonnochy 1952, 28, no.176, plate VIII; Walford and Way 1854, 378, with illustration), and Wangford, Suffolk (Tonnochy 1952, 32 no.191; Franks 1854, 23 with illustration). A matrix for Lothingland hundred, Suffolk is also similar (*Norfolk Archaeol.* 7 (1872), 357; Palmer 1875, 306 with illustration; Rye (ed.) 1909, 97 no.911). It was found in Norwich in August 1868 (Norwich Castle Museum acc. no.199.76.94).

The newly discovered matrix was found on the line of the Pilgrims Way, some 35 km (21 miles) west of Canterbury. If the 'good man' from Norfolk had lost it *en route* to the shrine of St Thomas, the irony would surely not have been lost on the workers of South Greenhoe who, according to the letter of the law, would have needed a sealed letter even for a trip to Walsingham.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS IN NORFOLK 1997

Edited by David Gurney

This is a selection of important finds (from an estimated total of more than 20,000 object identifications), details of which have been entered during 1997 onto the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record. This is maintained at the Norfolk Museums Service Landscape Archaeology Section at Gressenhall, and may be consulted by appointment. The list may include items found in earlier years of which the SMR was notified during 1997.

The entries are arranged by period and, within each period, by parish alphabetically. The number after the parish name is the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record number. Grid references have been omitted at the request of finders.

Metal artefacts are of copper alloy (bronze) and Iron Age, Saxon and medieval coins are of silver unless otherwise stated.