

RECENT ARCHAEOLOGY

A RECLINING MEDIEVAL KNIGHT AS A SLEEPING ROMAN SOLDIER, FROM SHINGHAM

by Steven Ashley, Andrew Rogerson and Helen Geake

A copper alloy figure of a sleeping knight (Fig. 1), found in 1999 in Shingham (in the civil parish of Beachamwell, SMR 34533), is an important addition to the small but growing group of medieval figurative pieces found with the use of metal detectors. Another member of this group, a lead alloy gittern player found near Thetford, adorns the cover of this journal (Margeson 1989).

The Shingham piece, 83mm long, is cast with a hollow reverse and is slightly curved longitudinally. There are two rivet holes. The facial features are carefully modelled and the helmet, mail, plate armour and surcoat indicate a 13th-century date. A very similar but slightly smaller example in the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology was donated by Sir Arthur Evans and may have been found in Cambridge (Stratford with Blair 1987).

There is no doubt that the two pieces are sleeping Roman soldiers, set in scenes of the Resurrection of Christ. Both examples are lying on their right elbows and facing to their left. In late 14th- and early 15th-century English alabaster panels of the Resurrection one of either three or four soldiers is almost invariably shown in the this position, below Christ who emerges from the tomb, either stepping over the soldier or placing His right foot on him (Cheetham 1984, 272–81).

The Resurrection was one scene of the Passion Cycle, the whole of which would have been set on the altar as a retable or in front of it as an antependium. Alternatively, the Shingham and Cambridge pieces may be derived from an Easter sepulchre, which in late medieval times was more normally a moveable wooden construction rather than a permanent masonry affair (Duffy 1992, 29–30). Both altar-pieces and Easter sepulchres would have been targets for 16th-century reformers; it is not hard to imagine how such a trifle as this sleeping soldier escaped being melted down, only to be thrown unwanted into a field.

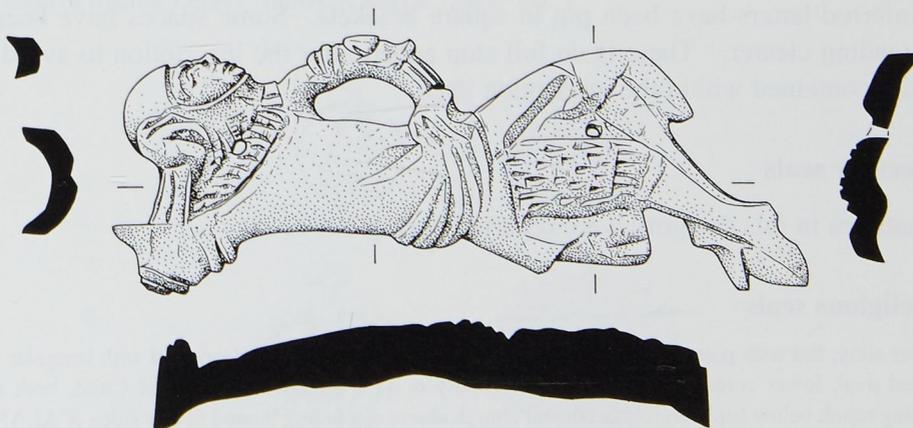


Fig. 1 Copper alloy figure of sleeping soldier from Shingham, scale 1:1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cheetham, F., 1984, *English Medieval Alabasters* (Oxford)

Duffy, E., 1992, *The Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven and London)

Margeson, S., 1989, 'A medieval musician from near Thetford', *Norfolk Archaeol.* 40, 325–6.

Stratford, N. with Blair, C., 1987 'A Gothic 'ivory' knight in the British Museum', *Antiq. J.* 57, 378–80.

MEDIEVAL SEAL MATRICES FROM NORFOLK, 1999

by Helen Geake, Andrew Rogerson and Steven Ashley

This paper is the second in an annual catalogue of the medieval seal matrices which are reported to Norfolk Museum Service's Identification and Recording Service. Seal matrices — especially those with inscriptions — are tiny documents which give important evidence for the development of surnames, personal property, literacy, heraldry, and social hierarchy in the medieval period. The matrices catalogued all have impressions which are available for study. This year's catalogue, exceptionally, includes one pre-Conquest example (no. 8) which will be fully published elsewhere.

The catalogue is divided into sections headed thus: official secular (although there is none in this category this year); official religious; personal seals with arms; personal seals with names; personal seals with mottoes; with initials only; without inscription; illegible. As far as possible entries are in alphabetical order.

The organisation of the catalogue entries is as follows. Material, overall shape of matrix. Shape of die, and size. Central motif. Surrounding inscription (and translation). Parish name and SMR number. Any reference or supporting information.

The inscriptions have been rendered as faithfully as possible, with illegible letters thus: Inferred letters have been put in square brackets. Some spaces have been added to make the reading clearer. There is no full stop added after the inscription to avoid confusion with any dot contained within the inscription itself.

Official secular seals

No seal matrices in this category were reported during 1999.

Official religious seals

1. Copper alloy, flat with pierced lug at one end on reverse; rest of reverse decorated with irregular rows of dots. Pointed oval, lower corner broken off but originally c. 47 x 29 mm. Virgin and Child, both nimbed, with kneeling monk below triple arch beneath and church above displacing legend to one side. S'ALANI· PRIORIS· DELIDEL· (Seal of Alan, Prior of Liddell). Alderford 19643. Which prior this seal matrix belonged to is in doubt. There is no known priory called Liddell or Liddle; but there is a priory at Haltemprice in East Yorkshire founded by Thomas Wake, Lord 'de Lidel', and its seal is Tonnochy 841. Fig. 1.