Topology and History of Epwell Village in the 13th century

This note attempts to provide some background to the discovery location of the recent Museum acquisition. It in no way implies any tangible connection between the Seal and Epwell. Various sources are used mainly Victoria County History Volume X.

A complete gold medieval seal matrix of 13th century date and in exceptional condition. The seal matrix is oval in plan with an applied gold spine and suspension loop on the reverse. In the centre of the front of the matrix is an oval dark green jasper intaglio, intricately engraved to depict a female in profile. The female wears a long veil about her head with either hair, or possibly pearls, visible above the forehead. The matrix has a personal legend in Latin around the outer edge beginning with a six-pointed star and reads '*SIGILVM : SECRETI : hEN :', translated as the 'Secret sea…

Topology

As the crow flies, Epwell is situated half-way between the towns of Banbury and Shipston-on-Stour, on the Oxfordshire-Warwickshire boundary. Its companion villages are Swalcliffe, Sibfords Gower and Feris, Tadmarton, Shutford and Shennington. Its nearest town is Banbury, 6.5 miles away, but Epwell was always the most remote of its villages, in some periods over 4 hours by cart from Banbury.

The village of 1140 acres lies 180 m. (600 ft.) above sea level with a sheltering ring of low hills reaching up to 220 m. (743 ft). The land is of a sandy brown, oolitic limestone which has formed layers of clay at the foots of the slopes.

The village of Swalcliffe, Epwell's neighbour, was the site of the largest Roman occupation in the county causing multiple Roman roads to cross the district. Old tracks such as the Ditchedge Lane form a parish boundary and mark Epwell's border with Warwickshire.

The area is well-watered with many limestone springs from which the village is named: Eoppa's Well where Eoppa is of Anglo-Saxon origin.

The Church (13th century)

Permanent Christianity came to the region, no doubt intermittently, after the 6th century AD. For most of its history until recently, Epwell was part of the ancient parish of Swalciffe. Charlbury, Cropredy, Swalcliffe and Banbury formed the Banbury Hundred which became an early endowment of the See of Dorchester, ruled and held by the pre-Conquest Bishops of Dorchester.

Following the Conquest, William I appointed Remegious de Fecamp as Bishop of Dochester who immediately transferred the See to Lincoln. This followed a ruling that Bishops should hold their seat in major towns, rather than in smaller communities. Because of this historic ruling, for a long time, the Banbury Hundred remained a "peculiar" of the Bishop of Lincoln. It follows that in the early medieval period of interest, all property in the Banbury Hundred, including Epwell and Swalcliffe was held by the Bishops of Lincoln under the rights and obligations of a feudal society.

The King (13th century)

1199:1216 (r)	John (Lackland)	House of Anjou	reigns 17 years
		Loss of Angevin empire	
		Baronial revolt	
		Magna Carta	
		French intrigue with English barons	
1216:1272 (r)	Henry III	House of Plantagenet	reigns 56 years
		Further French losses	
		Measures against Jews	
		Pious	
		Captured by Simon de Montfort	
		Freed by his own son	
1272:1307(r)	Edward 1 (Longshanks)	House of Plantagenet	reigns 35 years
		Measures against Jews	
		Subjects Wales to English rule	
		Hammer of the Scots	
		Recovers Aquitaine, Gascony	
		Parliament, administration	

The continual problems include baronial revolts, French wars, subjugation of Wales and Scotland, expulsion of the Jewish population, slow acceptance of parliament.

The Lincoln Bishops (13th century)
(ultimate holders of the Banbury Hundred (and Epwell))

1186:1200	Hugh of Avalon	(Saint Hugh of Lincoln, St. Giles, St Mary Magdalen)
1200:1203	See vacant	
1203:1206	William of Blois	
1206:1209	See vacant	
1209:1235	Hugh of Wells	
1235:1253	Robert Grossteste	(Statesman, scholastic philosopher, early science, Oxford)
1254:1258	Henry of Lexington	
1258:1279	Richard of Gravesend	(Supported Simon de Montfort, exiled)
1280:1299	Oliver Sutton	
1300:1320	John Dalderby	

Land Tenure in Epwell

Land and property holdings in Epwell were granted by the Bishop of Lincoln. The grants were of feudal nature requiring regular homage to the Bishop and some form of service in return. The service need not necessarily be military. In the VCH records many of the beneficiaries were called 'Knights of the Bishop of Lincoln'. The standard parcel of land was a 'fee' or 'fief' which was an amount of land sufficient to sustain one family and allow the knight to be able to perform his feudal service to his lord (BoL). Names and dates recorded in Epwell are:

Names: Stoke and Wykeham:

1166	Robert of Stoke
1166	Robert de Wykeham (may be the same person as Stoke)
1242	Robert II de Wykeham (claimed to be the son of Robert de Wykeham and grandson of Robert of Stoke
1252	Robert II de Wykeham in dispute over land
1279	Robert III de Wykeham holds Epwell Manor
1300	Robert III de Wykeham does homage to the Bishop of Lincoln for 3 fees

Names: Caperun and Frances

C12	Henry Caperun
	Robert and Alice Frances (sub-tenants)
	Robert Wheatfield, cousin to Alice, justice
1185	Henry II Caperun dispossessed of inheritance
	Thomas Caperun
	William Frances
1249	Robert Frances becomes Lord
1260	Robert Frances still living
1282	Robert Frances grants land and part of a mill to his son(?) Richard
1365	Robert Frances returned as Lord

Names: Danvers and Talemasch

C12	Robert Chevauchesul, and sisters Maud and Emma.
	Maud married Peter Talemasch.
	Emma married X Danvers
1198	Robert Danvers
1212	Robert Danvers and Peter II Talemasch held 1.5 fees in Swalcliffe
	Talemasch line fails, property reverts to Danvers
1279	Robert Danvers held a fee in Epwell
1300	Robert Danvers does homage to the Bishop for his fee in Epwell
1316	Simon Danvers was Lord of Epwell

Multiple generations in each family line in Epwell.
An actively feudal society.
Legal disputes over land resolved or 'worsened' by 'justicars'.
No female inheritance if male line fails.
All persons seem to be of senior rank – no peasants here.