



Wheathampstead History Society

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News and events

- Our committee met last week to discuss how best the Society can respond to the gradual release from lockdown. We made a provisional decision to relaunch our monthly programme of talks in January 2022. In the meantime, we will arrange a small number of outdoor 'walk and talk' sessions in the late summer and autumn. Details of these will be emailed to all members nearer the time.

Back to the future



If the new Boundary Commission proposals are approved Wheathampstead will no longer be part of the Harpenden and Hitchin ward for parliamentary elections. We will join a new ward called 'Berkhamsted and Harpenden'. While the geography of the new ward sounds unlikely there is an historic precedent. Wheathampstead was once part of the Danish Hundred that shares close similarities to the new ward, as shown above. One of the main differences is that Hemel Hempstead was in the Danish Hundred but is not in the proposed new ward.

Hundreds were the basis of administration across the country in the late Saxon era. According to the Domesday book, Hertfordshire was divided into eight Hundreds. The Danish Hundred, later called Dacorum, was made up of 18 manors and Wheathampstead was rated the most valuable.

Where did the name 'Danish' come from? Recent research has suggested that Hundreds had names based on either ownership or where the

Hundred court met. For example, a neighbouring Hundred was Hitchin Hundred. Hitchin has a so-called ingas name, signposting who 'owned' it. Hitchin literally meant 'the people of Hicca', a local tribe. So did the Danish Hundred get its name for a similar reason, because it was once a Danish possession during the Viking invasions?

John Baker from the Institute of Name Studies thinks otherwise. He suggests that 'Danish' is a corruption of 'denais'. 'Den' in old English means a valley and 'ais' is an ash tree. This suggests that 'denais' refers to the meeting place of the Hundred, an ash tree in a valley. This fits in with what we know about how Hundreds were organised. They met in the open air at the same recognisable landmark that often gave them their name.

Mike Smith

Interested in the origin of place names?
Visit the 'Survey of English place-names'
website <https://epns.nottingham.ac.uk>