

FONTS WITH REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS: SUPPLEMENT¹

By ALFRED C. FRYER

Three more Seven Sacrament fonts have been brought to our notice and we have to thank the Rev. Harold S. Squirrell of Cromer for discovering them. This brings our total number up to 26 for Norfolk and 42 for England.

'In 1463 John Causton alias Julian, Grocer, gave 10 marks to make a font of good work for the church of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich.'² This font stood originally at the crossing between the north and south doorways. It was soon found, however, inconvenient to have the font so near the west door as it was used on such occasions as civic processions when the Mayor and Corporation attended Divine Service. The font was, therefore, removed to the west end of the north aisle. The steps were then altered and a magnificent wooden canopy, octagonal in plan and standing on four legs was erected.³

The first mutilation of this beautiful example of East Anglian Art belonging to a series of fonts of which Croxton,⁴ Earsham⁵ and Cratfield⁶ are variants⁷ took place in 1623. It was at that time a platform of wood was erected round the font and the seated statues of the Evangelists and their emblems at the base were

¹The first paper on this subject appeared in this *Journal* LIX (1900), 17-66, and the second in LXXXVII (1931), 24-59.

²The church was completely rebuilt between 1430 and 1455.

³The oak font-cover at Trunch, Norfolk, is the most splendid surviving example; but the one in St. Peter Mancroft is considered to be the earlier of the two. Messrs. Crossley and Howard in their valuable work on *English Church Woodwork*, remark: 'The drum with an elaborate niche in each side and ogee dome, is a restoration, but the legs and the flat canopy on which it stands are genuine work of typical late fifteenth-century East Anglian making. Each leg is composed of four small circular

shafts with niches and crocketed tracery between, terminating in an ornate arched and battlemented pedestal, now supporting an angel of modern date. The edge of the flat canopy is decorated with exquisite foliated arches and a beautiful cresting, and the soffit is elaborately vaulted' (Pp. 325-6).

⁴LXXXVII, 43-56; Pl. v, no. 1. Denuded of sculpture.

⁵LXX, 141-144, Pl. i; LXXXVII, Pl. ii.

⁶LIX, 20, 39-66; LXX, 141, Pl. ii; LXXXVII, Pl. iii.

⁷Many sculptors worked on these Seven Sacrament fonts and some of them may be grouped together when they possess certain well-defined

damaged so that the joists for the floor-boards could rest upon them.¹

A still more serious injury to the delicate sculpture adorning this exquisite font took place by an ordinance of the Long Parliament of August 28th, 1643, directing the general demolition of altars, the removal of candlesticks and the defacement of pictures and images.²

These men ruthlessly destroyed the painted pictures which adorned the bowl, the sculptured angels standing under canopies on the corner-shafts, the demi angels and the rose en soleil on the chamfer of the bowl and the eight statues of saints in niches round the pedestal. When the iconoclasts had finished their drastic work the church authorities covered the shaft with plaster, painted the font more than once, enveloping it, finally, in a thick coating of sombre black paint.

In 1740, Francis Blomefield, the topographer of Norfolk, wrote :—‘ At the west end of the north aisle, enclosed with rails, stands a large ancient font, with its top supported by pillars, and a heavy looking thing painted and in good repair.’ No wonder the poor font looked ‘ heavy ’ with all its charming sculpture, gilded canopies and painted stone-work hacked off and the whole shrouded in black paint.

We must now record the last stage of humiliation this poor font was called upon to suffer. In 1886 a brand new Victorian font was presented to the church and the old font was hidden away in a crypt where the boiler for the heating apparatus and coals were stored. At last, the Vicar and the Churchwardens discovered it and once again this famous fifteenth-century Seven Sacrament font was restored to its former place under the ancient font-canopy. A generous

characteristic details, such as at Sloley, Seething and Gayton Thorpe in Norfolk, and at Badingham, Laxfield and Southwold in Suffolk. These groups of fonts were not all made by the same mason—as they vary in the quality of the craftsmanship. In a few cases the great similarity of the work indicates that one imager carved at least two fonts such as those at Westhall and Wenhaston, and at Woodbridge and Great

Glemham in Suffolk, and at Alderford and Great Witchingham in Norfolk.

¹They are now shapeless pieces of stone denuded of sculpture. The wooden platform was not removed until 1769.

²For this purpose the Earl of Manchester, as General of certain associated counties, selected fanatics to carry out this decree, such as William Dowsing and his chief deputy, Francis Jessop of Beccles.

friend, in the person of Mr. R. H. Flood,¹ of Norwich, took a kindly interest in the medieval font, which was, probably, the *chef d'oeuvre* of some Norwich imager, famous for his skill in delicate sculpture.

Seven out of eight panels of the bowl are defaced, but the eighth panel on the north-east side is less damaged, and on one half we can see it was a painted picture representing *Baptism*, the first of the Seven Sacraments that adorned the flat surface of an English font. Here is an octagonal font painted to represent white or gray stone with a small device in the centre of each panel. Above the font, where the officiating priest would stand, is a mass of red which we conjecture was his vestment (cope?). The other half of the painting is destroyed and probably represented a group of an acolyte holding the open ritual and the godparents.²

This font was most likely the first of the whole series as it was made in 1463,³ and it is of special interest to find that painting on the flat and not sculpture was the earliest attempt in England to represent the Seven Sacraments on a baptismal font.⁴

Walpole St. Peter gave the name to the Walpole family⁵ and the splendid Perpendicular church is well called 'the gem of the Marshland churches of Norfolk.' The sculptures of the Seven Sacraments

¹ The Church of St. Peter Mancroft is indebted to Mr. R. H. Flood for the personal labour he has expended in removing the many coats of paint which have so long disfigured their ancient font, and for his conservative restoration of portions of the bowl and pedestal.

² The author of this series of papers visited the church of St. Peter Mancroft in 1889, expecting to find a Seven Sacrament font. He made many inquiries as to the fate that had overtaken the fifteenth-century font, as he found a Victorian font where it formerly stood, but all to no purpose. He little knew that the ancient font was then hidden away in a crypt—forgotten and uncared for.

³ In our second paper (LXXXVII, p. 29) the date c. 1465 was considered a possible date for the Monk's Soham font as the first of the series, and,

probably, this is the case as regards the sculptured representations. There was frequent communication at that time between East Anglia and the Netherlands and it is just possible that the artist who painted pictures of the Seven Sacraments on the St. Peter Mancroft font had seen the wonderful painting of the Seven Sacraments which Roger Van der Weyden painted for Jean Chevrot, bishop of Tournai, at some date between 1450 and 1460. It is quite possible the artist who painted the panels and the craftsman who made the font were two different men.

⁴ Painted glass was earlier in England by certainly 30 years. See LXXXVII, p. 30.

⁵ The Walpole family migrated to New Houghton, or Houghton-in-the-Brake, early in the twelfth century.



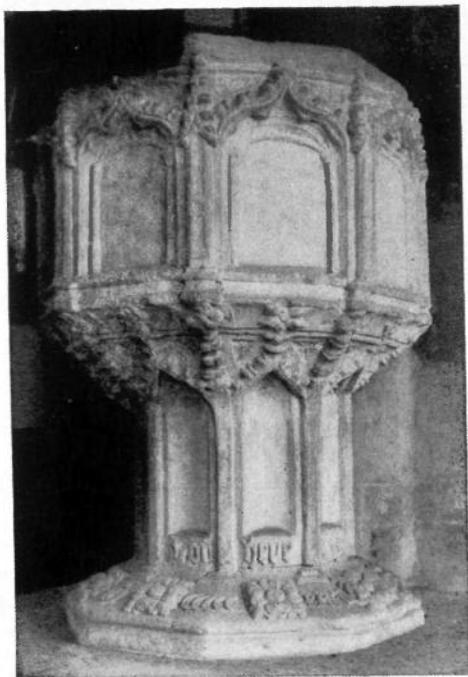
A. ST. PETER MANCROFT,
NORWICH

To face page 100.



B. BURGH ST. MARGARET,
NORFOLK

PLATE I.



WALPOLE ST. PETER, NORFOLK

have been completely defaced with the exception of the outline of heads on one panel. The whole font¹ is a little heavy in appearance, owing to the somewhat coarse carving of the overhanging crocketed canopies of the bowl and pedestal. On the base is inscribed the date 1532, while beneath the empty niches of the stem are the words THYNK AND THANK. This motto is carved in large, bold lettering on the sixteenth-century tower of Great Ponton Church,² near Grantham, by the donor in the extended form of THYNK AND THANK GOD OF ALL. The font is made of Barnack stone (a coarse oolite) quarried near Peterborough.

The sixteenth-century pleasing Jacobean font-cover³ of post-Reformation design, has a wooden drum surmounted by a lofty spire. The drum possesses shutters opening outwards like a triptych when required for a baptism.

The Seven Sacrament font in the Church of Burgh St. Margaret having served for the rite of Baptism during four centuries of good and evil days, was turned out into the churchyard by the then Rector (the Rev. Charles John Lucas) and the churchwardens. A Victorian font took the place of the discarded fifteenth-century one. After remaining in the churchyard for some time the Rev. C. J. Lucas presented this ancient font to Mr. Daniel Spurrell who gave it a home in the beautiful garden of Bessingham Manor, near Cromer, and here it has remained for more than half a century.⁴

¹ Made from Barnack stone (a coarse oolite) quarried near Peterborough.

² Some years earlier than the Walpole St. Peter font was made.

³ The octagonal drum has panels, separated with columns, holding the moulded roof with an elaborate cresting, out of which rises the lofty spire. Each panel of the drum is curved to represent a round-headed archway seen in perspective with architrave, frieze and cornice. The frieze is carved with tilting scenes, etc. The spire is in 4 sections and is richly carved and surmounted with a finial of the common Jacobean design of a ball with a spike. See Bond's *Fonts and Font Covers*, 117, 291, 299,

Illus. 306; *Walls' Porches and Fonts*, 336.

⁴ During these fifty years many changes have taken place; Mr. Daniel Spurrell has passed away and the Rev. C. J. Lucas died in October, 1895. Now the owner of Bessingham Manor is Mr. E. Denham Spurrell, who has made a generous offer to return the font to the church of Burgh St. Margaret. Much as the present Rector would like to see the font once again restored to its old home, yet he is unable to accept this kind offer. It is true the Victorian font is no longer in the church; but the present font is a memorial to the memory of Miss Edith Fisher, the Rector's aunt, and could not be removed.

This octagonal font has suffered much from the hand of the puritan iconoclast of the seventeenth century. Nearly all the sculpture on the bowl has been defaced and only vestiges of canopies and figures remain, while the beautiful demi angels which once adorned the chamfer are now only fragments of stone. The pedestal now has plain panels and it is quite possible that they were once painted like those on the Wenhasten font with flowers and fifteenth-century patterns and devices.

So many of our ancient fonts have been denuded of their medieval paint that it is now possible to find the guild and mason marks which were originally cut or scratched in the stone. Mr. Flood discovered the mason's mark on this font, while at Burgh-next-Aylesham the Guild mark, somewhat like our R followed by 1 is found scratched under the panel for matrimony and the Mason's mark under the panel for penance. Others have also been recorded.

Few names of the masons, however, are now known, yet *W. Pyche* was the mason employed by the churchwardens to make the Seven Sacrament font at East Dereham in 1468 at the cost of £12 18s. 9d.

These fonts vary considerably when we class them as works of art; some like those at Wendling¹ in Norfolk, and Farningham² in Kent, are childlike in conception and craftsmanship, while those like the font in Norwich Cathedral³ and the one at Little Walsingham⁴ in Norfolk, are the work of highly skilled artists. Many imagers were employed on these Seven Sacrament fonts and most of them are charming in detail, vigorous in execution and can in no way be classed as sentimental in conception. The artist has laid colour on the sculpture with a heavy hand at Great Witchingham,⁵ Norfolk, and on other fonts, while at Westhall⁶ and Wenhaston⁷ in Suffolk, the gesso on the flat surface possesses flowers and fifteenth-century devices very delicately and skilfully repro-

¹ Illus. LXXXVII, Pl. xii, no. 1 and 2.

² Illus. LIX, Pl. xiv, no. 2.

³ Illus. LIX, Pl. iii, no. 1.

⁴ Illus. LIX, Pl. ii, no. 2.

⁵ Illus. LIX, Pl. ii, no. 1; Pl. iv, no. 2; Pl. vi, no. 1; Pl. viii, no. 1; Pl. xi, Fig. 1; Pl. xiii, no. 1.

⁶ Illus. LIX, Pl. x, no. 1.

⁷ Illus. LXXXVII, Pl. iv, no. 1.

duced. These Seven Sacrament fonts were in many cases real artistic achievements produced near the close of the Perpendicular period of which East Anglia may indeed, well be proud. Norwich was a great centre like London and Bristol for medieval craftsmanship, and we find most conscientious work turned out from her ateliers during the period when these fifteenth-century fonts were being made. This was, however, a time of decline in the subtle inspiration of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, yet the work of these imagers was very rich in detail and their grouping of figure-sculpture presented pictorial expression. These fonts as we now find them must not be judged too severely, for they formed a part of a splendid colour scheme in which walls, ceilings, screens, and windows all blended into one glorious pageant of colour-decoration. Now, alas! these fonts, for the most part, have been scraped clean of all their paint and gilding and much of their figure-sculpture has been chipped, defaced and damaged. Some, indeed, have had all their sculpture removed and the representations of the Seven Sacraments at Croxton,¹ Blythburgh, Southwold and Wenhaston² have been as completely defaced as those at Burgh St. Margaret, Walpole St. Peter and St. Peter Mancroft.

We desire to express our warm thanks to the Rev. Harold S. Squirrell for his photographs of the Burgh St. Margaret font, and the one in the ancient church of Walpole St. Peter, and also to Mr. R. H. Flood for the one in St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich, so that illustrations might be reproduced from them for this paper.

¹ Illus. LXXXVII. Pl. v. no. 1.

² Illus. LXXXVII. Pl. iv. no. 1.

APPENDIX

C = Circumference. H = Height. D = Depth. Int. = Interior.
R = Rim. Ext. = Exterior.

NORFOLK

BURGH ST. MARGARET.

Pedestal and base. Octagonal with panels (1 ft. 6 in. by 9 in.) having attached corner-shafts with bases (2 in.) set in a low plinth (2 in.). Panels now plain, possibly painted with flowers and fifteenth-century devices—like Wenhaston (Suffolk). See LXXXVII, p. 44, Pl. iv, no. 1.

Bowl. Octagonal with moulded panels (each 1 ft. 4 in. by 1 ft. 1 in.), sculpture = 12½ in. by 10 in., D Int. = 11 in., R = 4 in. to 5 in., Diam. Int. = 1 ft. 10 in. Sculpture nearly all defaced and only mutilated canopies and figures visible.

Chamfer of bowl. Each face = 12½ in. by 9 in. by 4½ in. Fragments of sculpture denote that one demi angel adorned each face.

This font has found a home in the garden of Bessingham Manor, near Cromer, as it was a gift from the Rev. Charles John Lucas, Rector of Burgh St. Margaret, to the late Mr. Daniell Spurrell. See Plate 1B.

NORWICH

ST. PETER MANCROFT.

Pedestal and base. Octagonal. Each face (2 ft. 2 in. by 10 in.) possesses a moulded pedestal for statue (11 in.) now lost inserted in a round headed niche, while the corners possessed circular pilasters (red) having moulded circular capitals and bases. At the corners of the base were carved originally figures of the seated Evangelists and the four Living Creatures. They are now defaced.

Bowl. Octagonal. Each face is 1 ft. 2 in. by 1 ft. 2 in. The Seven Sacraments have been painted on the panels (10 in. by 9 in.) and the remains of the painting for *Baptism* may still be seen on the N.E. panel. The outline of an octagonal font painted to represent white or gray stone with some slight decoration in the centre of each panel. Behind it is a mass of red colour which may be the priest's vestment (cope?) who was standing behind it. This font is on

one side of the panel and the other portion is defaced and probably contained a group of the acolyte holding the open ritual and the god-parents. The chamfer under the rim and over each panel is adorned with a band of delicately carved quatrefoils, having roses as centres. Sculptured angels (destroyed) stood in corner-niches beneath over-hanging canopies, while the chamfer of the bowl had 8 rows of parallel horizontal mouldings with demi angels and roses *en soleil* (destroyed) beneath. Diam. Int. = 2 ft. 1 in., D = 1 ft., R = 5 in. to 7 in.

This font was made in 1463 of Ancaster stone. See Plate IA.

WALPOLE ST. PETER.

Pedestal and base. Octagonal. Each face (1 ft. 3 in. by 8 in.). Contains a niche, now tenantless (1 ft. by 5 in. by $1\frac{3}{4}$ in.), having crocketed canopy with finial and rectangular corner-shafts with bases. Beneath is the motto THYNK AND THANK. The plinth is adorned with 8 large four-leaf flowers and the date 1532.

Bowl. Octagonal. Each face (1 ft. 10 in. by 1 ft. 2 in.) has corner-panelled buttresses with crocketed gables. Above the sculpture (destroyed) is a lierne roof supported on two circular columns with capitals over which was a crocketed canopy. Eight demi angels are placed at the corners of the chamfer and between them is one rose, 3 perpendicular ornaments and the Emblems of the Evangelists; the winged ox for St. Luke, and the winged lion for St. Mark are in good preservation. The carving on this font is a little coarser than many of the Norfolk fonts of this series. See Plate II.

References. LXXXIX, 366; Bond's *Fonts and Font-Covers*, 117; Tyrrell-Green's *Baptismal Fonts*, 164.