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PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
Cambridge Antiquarian Society,

OCTOBER 1935—OCTOBER 1936



VOLUME XXXVII



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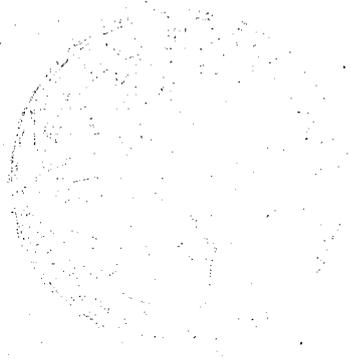
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STONE BOWL FOUND ON THE GUILDHALL SITE.

By LOUIS COBBETT, M.D., F.R.C.S.,
and E. SAVILLE PECK, M.A.

During excavations for the new Guildhall buildings on Peas Hill, opposite St Edward's Church, there was found, in 1935, a large ornamental stone bowl which some have thought may have been a font¹ (Pl. Ia).

It is said by one of the workmen who found it to have been 14 feet beneath the present surface level, to have been raised on some sort of base, and to have stood under an arch. But, unfortunately, no one with any knowledge of architecture or antiquities saw it *in situ*.

It has undergone much injury, and parts of the rim and other features are missing, but it is sufficiently complete to show what it was like originally. The stone of which it is made is a rough one, apparently Barnack. In form it consists of a basin, supported by four projecting, vertical wings. Each of these divides below, sending out a process which extends outwards to unite with a similar process sent out from the neighbouring wing. Thus the round bowl is set on a square base, and is, so to speak, supported in a sort of cradle formed by the four wings and their basal processes. The bowl shows some suggestion of a rim, indicated by a groove which encircles it a few inches below its top.

Two of the wings are considerably larger than the other two, their maximum projection being $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches. They are carefully formed and brought to a sharp edge. On one there still remains a rather shapeless projection or boss. The other two, which are intermediate, project little more than an inch, and are simpler in form. The bowl measures internally $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches in breadth and 8 inches in depth. Externally it is 19 inches in diameter and 12 inches high, and its almost square base measures 18 inches each way.

Several similar bowls have come to our notice. One, now

¹ The bowl is now preserved in the Cambridge and County Folk Museum.

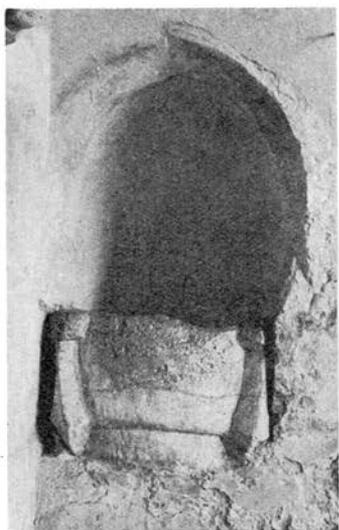
PLATE I



a. Guildhall Site, Cambridge.



b. Hereford Folk Museum.



c. Linton, Cambs.



d. Herringswell, Suffolk.

in the Saffron Walden Museum (Pl. II *d*), is said to have been used as a font in the church there. It is made of a smooth, white stone, and measures $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches in external diameter. Its height is only 9 inches, but the top seems to have been cut off smooth in order to fit it with a lid; there are, however, no holes for staple or hinges. This alteration, if indeed it actually took place, seems to indicate that the bowl was not made for a font. The cavity, however, is very square at the bottom, and seems inconvenient for grinding things.

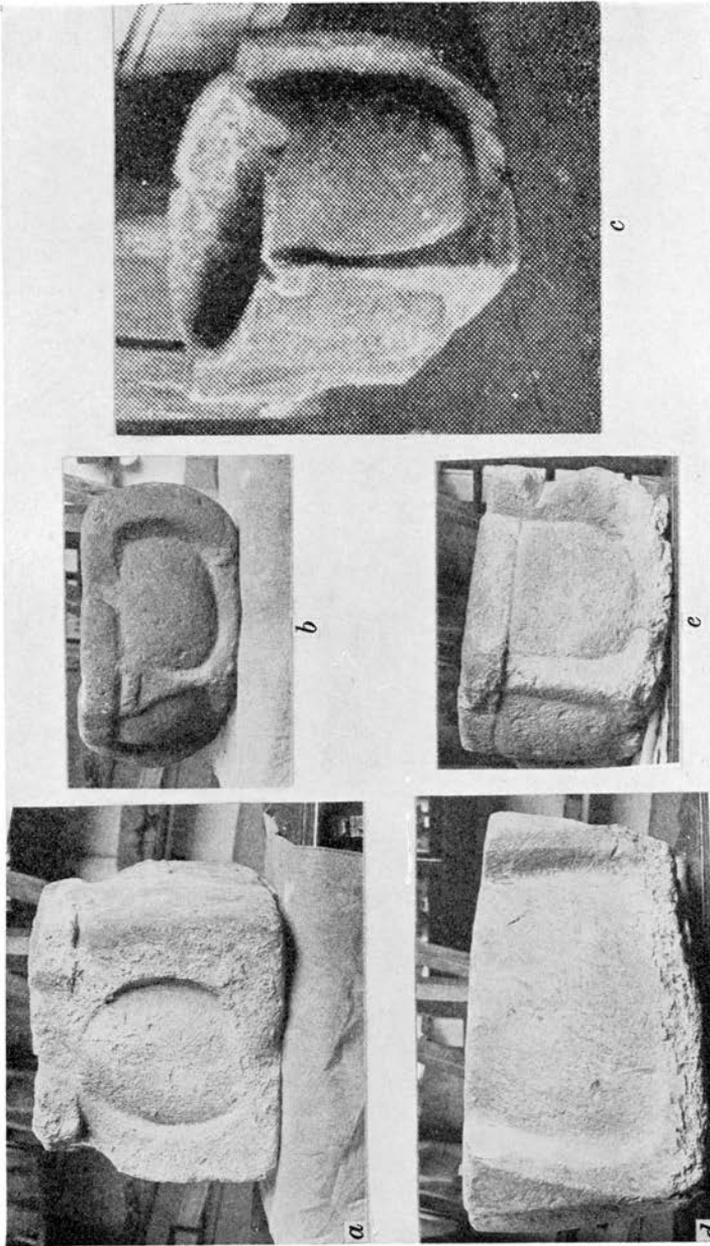
Another bowl in the Walden Museum is said to have come from Thunderley Church (Pl. II *e*), half-way between that town and Thaxted. In 1842 the church was allowed to fall into ruin, and its materials were used for secular purposes, and "in 1861 every particle of the fabric had disappeared". The bowl was found in 1865, in the foundations of a house said to have been built of materials taken from the church. It is almost exactly like the Cambridge bowl, having unequal wings dividing and encircling the bowl below, but it is rather smaller, measuring 14 by 9 inches.

In the Hereford Folk Museum is an almost identical bowl (Pl. I *b*), which measures 18 by 12 inches, nearly the same as the Cambridge bowl.

In the Walden Museum there is a smaller dark bowl of the same type with pronounced rim and unequal wings (Pl. II *b*). It is not known where it came from. There is also another remotely similar, but differing in its proportions, which is said to have been used as a stoup in the chapel at Whittlesford Bridge (Pl. II *a*): It measures $10\frac{1}{2}$ by 9 inches.

At Linton (Cambs), in the corner of the church porch, is a very large bowl, formerly used as a stoup (Pl. I *c*). It is very like the Cambridge example, but differs in having a groove round it a few inches from the bottom, below which the bowl is recessed; and in the fact that the wings do not divide below and form a cradle for the bowl. It measures 24 inches in external diameter and is 15 inches in height.

At Herringswell, 6 miles north-east of Newmarket, is another old stoup of the same type but considerably smaller (Pl. I *d*). It measures 14 by 11 inches. The fact that it is but half a broken bowl, built into a corner so that the two walls



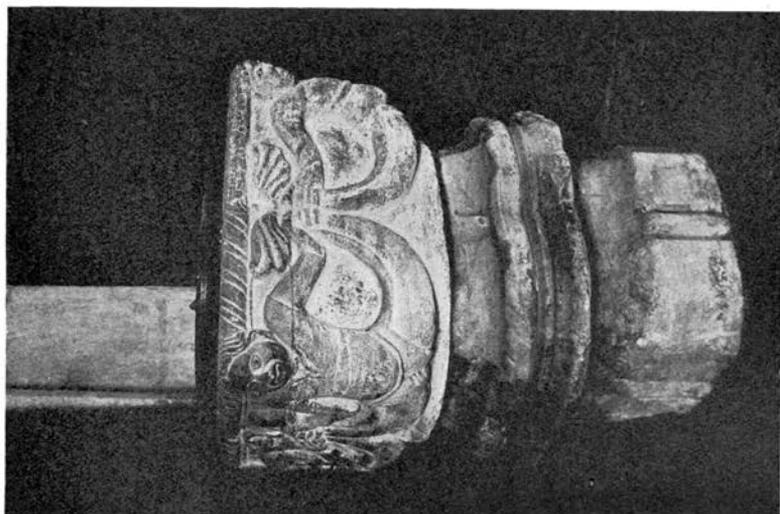
c. Basle.

b. Saffron Walden Museum.

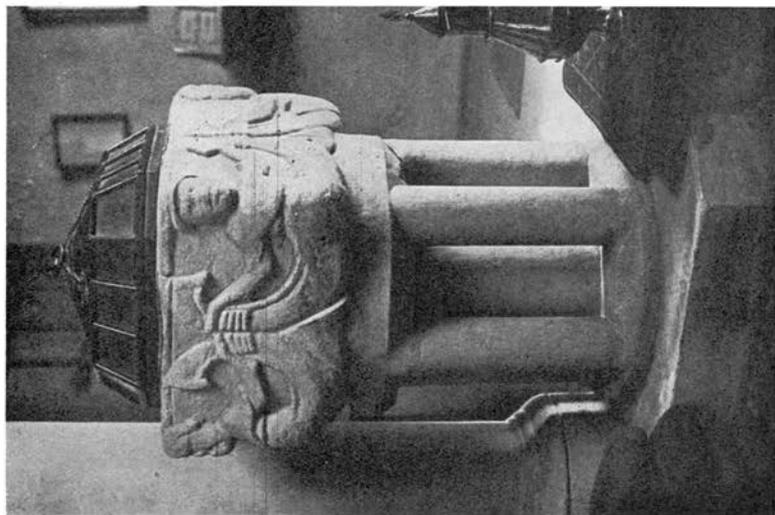
e. ?Thunderley.

a. ?Whittlesford Chapel.

d. Saffron Walden Museum.



b. St Peter's, Cambridge.



a. Anstey, Herts.

form the other sides of the stoup, shows that it was not made for the purpose, but was probably an old mortar re-used.

At Conway a bowl of this kind was found built into a wall (illustrated in Francis Bond's *Fonts and Font Covers*, p. 72), and another was found among some church lumber at the vicarage.

At the University Museum at Basle, in the Pharmazeutische Altertumskunde, is a bowl similar to the type under discussion but differing a little in proportions (Pl. IIc). It measures 12 by 10 inches and is described as a mortar in Vosges sandstone.

Thus, as we have seen, this type of bowl is fairly common. Though most of them are associated with churches, and several of them are known to have been used as stoups and one as a font, it seems probable that they were all originally made for mortars, and have been turned to ecclesiastical purposes. We know no such bowl in use as a font in a church to-day;¹ and it seems unlikely that they were ever made for this purpose. Those with two wings projecting considerably more than the other two, being thus unsymmetrical, could hardly have been designed as fonts, though they may afterwards have been put to this use.

We are, therefore, inclined to think that these bowls were originally made as mortars and not as fonts and stoups. Yet they may have been prototypes of the more ornamental Norman fonts, such as those at Anstey in Hertfordshire (Pl. IIIa) and St Peter's, Cambridge (Pl. IIIb), in which the wings take the form of mermen whose tails divide and encircle the bowl below, just as the wings do in several of the bowls we have described.

The bowl found on the Guildhall site at Cambridge, then, was in all probability originally a mortar. It may have been used as a font, just as a similar bowl was used at Saffron Walden in the church there. In favour of this assumption is the fact that at one corner of the rim is the base of an iron bolt leaded into stone, and opposite to it the rim is broken away, thus suggesting that the bowl was once provided with a hinged lid and padlock.

¹ Since this was written we have found a font of this type in Castor Church, Northants.

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