

ART. XI.—*The Baptismal Fonts in the Rural Deanery of Carlisle, N.* BY THE REV. J. WILSON, M.A., Vicar of Dalston.

Read at Carlisle, Sep. 15th, 1888.

WHEN I undertook to write a paper on Baptismal Fonts, my first idea was to select a few of the most notable in the Diocese, and confine my remarks to them. But on further consideration it seemed a very fragmentary sort of way to treat an important subject and after visiting some score of churches the conclusion forced itself upon me that, as ancient Fonts lurked in the most unexpected places, nothing less than a visit to every church would be satisfactory. The little experience I have already gained is of itself enough to justify the undertaking. The history of Fonts in England since the Reformation is not a bright one, and if the time ever comes when the survey of our territorial limits is complete, it will be found that the Diocese of Carlisle furnishes no exception to the general rule.

It is lamentable to think how many ancient Fonts have been irreparably injured from neglect or wilfully destroyed; the Puritans appear to have been especially hostile to them, and up to the present day too many of those who ought to be their guardians have paid little or no attention to their decent preservation: in some (but probably very few) instances after having been discarded for a time, the ancient Font was restored to its original situation in the Church. (Glossary of Architecture vol. I, p. 214. Note).

We shall presently learn the truth of these remarks and how amply they are illustrated in and about Carlisle. It is to be hoped that one good result at least may come out of our investigation. There are many Fonts up and down the Diocese which cannot lay claim to much antiquity but still they have been used as “the sacred laver of Re-
generation

generation" for years, some of them for centuries: they are now to be seen at churchwardens' doors or in rectory gardens, certainly not for a sacred purpose. From their intimate association with the history and spiritual life of the parish, one would fain see them having a place in the vicinity of the church, and treated with that care which the vehicle of a Holy Sacrament deserves.

ST. PAUL'S, CARLISLE.

The Font in this church tells a sad story. It was originally in the nave of the Cathedral, but was transferred to S. Paul's and placed on the north side of the west door when that church was completed in 1870. The event was thus chronicled in a local paper describing the ceremony of Consecration.

The Font which is placed near the west door was formerly in the old church of St. Mary. It is of the date of the middle of the fifteenth century and is a plainly moulded octagonal monument. When removed from the nave of the Cathedral, it was somewhat dilapidated* and it has since been reworked and some fresh carving inserted. (*Carlisle Patriot*, Dec. 2, 1870.)

It is not easy to discover what the Font was like before it underwent the transformation mentioned in the *Patriot*, no notice of it occurring in any of the County histories, guides to Carlisle, lectures on the Cathedral, or in any local literature I am acquainted with. There is nothing about its appearance now to mark its pre-Reformation date except the staple-fangs in the lip, and a Dove in relief on the side of the bowl. The Revd. Francis Richardson, vicar of Corbridge-on-Tyne, and first Incumbent of S. Paul's, writes on this subject.

The Font was in old St. Mary's Church when it formed part of the Cathedral. When the new St. Mary's was built, the architect of the

* For the condition of the interior of St. Mary's Church one hundred and fifty years ago, see the letter of Prebendary Wilson to Dr. Waugh.

Mounsey's *Carlisle in 1745*, p. 186.

new

new Church presented the Font which they now have. The late Mr. * * * * * I heard, had either removed or intended to remove the old Font into his garden. In order to save it from the improper use to which it was apparently intended to put it, and to preserve a relic of old St. Mary's in which I believe, generations of Carlisle people had been baptized, I applied to Dean Close to have it removed to St. Paul's. My request was complied with and I had it repaired, and with one exception had what was sculptured on the Font altered into the sacred monogram. The exception was a Dove with a branch in its mouth, which you will still find there.* The only thing I remember was the defaced figure of a man clasping a sort of oval in front of him, which looked like having once had a coat of arms or some device upon it.



Whilst undergoing this "repair" the form of the Font was changed from a hexagon into an octagon, very slightly lop-sided. The work, whatever else may be said of it, was a triumph of skill and a guarantee of some mathematical knowledge on the part of the architect, the builder or whatever person was responsible for the alteration. That the Font was originally a hexagon is beyond doubt. It appears as such in a plate of the nave of the Cathedral drawn in 1813 by Clennell, for Scott's *Border Antiquities*, and is classified by Mr. F. A. Paley amongst hexagonal Fonts in his introduction to the "Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts," published in 1844 by Van Voorst. Ayliffe Poole who wrote about the same time as Paley, bears a like testimony—"that at Carlisle Cathedral is hexagonal."

* NOTE TO DOVE:—It will be seen from the illustration that the Dove on the Font is very similar to the dove-figures which appear on the iron-work of the entrance to the Abbey in Castle Street. Is there any connection? It would be interesting to know why the Dean and Chapter should use a symbol of this nature!

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—I do not think the Dove on the Cathedral railing has any symbolic meaning: the railing was erected in 1838, from the design of Mr. Billings, (*Architectural Illustrations of Carlisle Cathedral* by R. W. Billings, London, T. and W. Boone, 1840, p. 7). The dove and laurel sprig was the crest of Dr. Hodgson, then dean.

(Churches :

(*Churches: their structure, arrangement, and decoration*; p. 49). But the source from which probably both Paley and Poole got their information was a paper read before the Society of Antiquaries in 1790, by Dr. Gough, and printed in Vol. X, p. 192, of the *Archæologia*. Speaking of ancient Fonts, he says "That in Carlisle Cathedral, hexagon, has a cross on a shield (the arms of the See) and a rude face." This account coincides with Mr. Richardson's recollections, and the imperfect sketch in the *Border Antiquities*, the latter of which seems to shew a rude cross on the face of the bowl.

The mention of armorial bearings on the Font may give us a clue to fix its approximate date. Though the hexagon is generally characteristic of Decorated work, it is no positive proof of date, as examples of that form are found in almost every Gothic period: much reliance, therefore, cannot be placed upon it, unless backed up by supplementary presumptions. The custom of placing armorial bearings on Fonts seems to have commenced in the Decorated, if not in the early English period, upon which Poole says:

It is worthy of remark that this inapposite decoration for the Font came into general use just when heraldry was losing whatever religion it once had. So long as it was religious, it was too humble to appear, except in rare instances, in such a place; but after the Crusades, and with the mock chivalry of the Tudors, with hexagon Fonts and debased architecture, the custom of decorating Fonts with armorial bearings became common. (*Churches: p. 49.*)

The symbolism of the Dove which remains *in statu quo* is very evident. It carries us to our Lord's Baptism when "the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a Dove, upon Him." Its mystical meaning is well expressed in a popular hymn

We love the sacred Font
 For there the Holy Dove
 To pour is ever wont
 His blessings from above.

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I have met with another reading of the sacred symbol in the *Bestiary* published by the Early English Text Society and of date about the middle of the thirteenth century. It is so applicable to the Dove on Fonts as explaining the duties and responsibilities of the catechumens that I have ventured to quote a few lines

woning *and* groning is lic hire song,
 bimene we us, we hauen done wrong.
 In water ge is wis of heuckef come ;
 and we in boke wid deules nome ;
 In hole of ston ge maked hire nest,
 In cristes milce ure hope is best.

(*Old English Miscellany*, p. 25).

Staples or their marks in the lip of the bowl may be taken as characteristic of pre-Reformation Fonts. Large iron staples were wedged with lead into the bowl for the purpose of securing a lid or cover. There are usually three of these to be found, two for the hinges and one for the hasp or lock. We have the reason for the origin and use of Font covers in the Constitutions of Archbishop Edmund in 1236

Fontes Baptismales sub sera clausi
 teneantur propter sortilegia : chrisma
 similiter & oleum sacrum sub
 clavi custodiantur

Lyndwood's note on *propter sortilegia* is so quaint that I am forced to give it

Quae honestius est tacere quam dicere
 (*Provinciale*, lib. iii tit. 25.)

Some of the covers, but very few, of pre-Reformation date, remain. I have met with none as yet, but when attention is called to them, some may be discovered stowed away in belfries, galleries, or parsonages. It may be
 noticed

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noticed that the ecclesiastical injunction for providing covers for the Fonts is not mentioned in the canons of 1571 or 1603, yet in many Dioceses since the Reformation, the Bishops made a point of requiring their continuance. In a neighbouring Diocese, Archdeacon Cosin, afterwards Bishop of Durham, as late as 1627, inserts among his questions in the "Articles of Inquiry in the Archdeaconry of the East Riding of York."

Whether have you a Font of stone, *with a comely cover*, set in the ancient usual place. (Bp. Cosin's Works vol. ii., 4.)

As 17th century covers exist in abundance elsewhere, we may reasonably expect that some will turn up in the Diocese of Carlisle.

The predecessor of the S. Paul Font in the Cathedral was Norman, and very likely coeval with the original building, parts of the bowl, if we believe Mackenzie Walcott, having been found built into the walls of the nave.

Two fragments of a sculptured Norman Font were discovered in the walls of the nave, and south wing of the Transept, built apparently into this position c. 1300. (*Memorials of Carlisle*, p. 16.)

In the Pipe Rolls of 34th Henry II there is an interesting though indirect allusion to this Font, which is worthy of record here. After the death of Bishop Bernard, the See of Carlisle was vacant some years, but how long does not clearly appear.

The See of Carlisle is said to have been vacant for over 30 years after the death of Bernard, but the assertion is not borne out by the Pipe Rolls, in which an account of its revenues is only rendered for two years, the 33rd and 34th of Henry II.

This is the opinion of the writer of the introduction to the Pipe Rolls of Cumberland and Westmorland, published by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-on-Tyne. At all events it is agreed that Bishop Bernard died in 1186,
and

and that for the following two years the Sheriff includes the Episcopal Revenues in his returns to the Exchequer. The account is headed—

Epat' Carleolii de ij annis

in which is found the following item of expenditure.

Et pro oleo ad Sacramtum Paschale duobus terminis, 7 eo defendo a Londino usque Carleolum xiiij.s.

The Sheriff spent fourteen shillings* on oil and its carriage from London† for the Paschal Sacrament. Easter was the chief season for the administration of Baptism and the cost of the Holy oil necessary for Benediction and Unction in that Sacrament was defrayed out of the revenues of the vacant Bishopric.

What this Norman Font was like we have no data to show. There are two drawings of a Font on the back of the Cathedral stalls, one in the second panel of the Legend of S. Anthony, and the other in the tenth of S. Augustine. The form of both Fonts is circular and chalice-shaped; the panel representing the baptism of Augustine, shows the figure of a catechumen standing to his waist in the bowl.

Connected with the Service of the Font I must not omit to mention the Cathedral Wells. Of these there are two, both in the Transept, and in close proximity to the place where the Font stood, as shown in Mr. Christian's ground plan of the nave in 1852. "In the west wall" of the south arm of the Transept "is seen the buttressing arch of the Tower: in the eastern pier is a pointed entrance of the 12th century, opening upon a well, 25 feet deep, which was dug to drain a spring which flows across the Transept, and caused the subsidence of the Tower piers." (Walcott's *Memorials*, p. 21). Further on he adds "near

* Incorrectly given in Nicolson & Burn as £14.

† Why the Holy Oil for Baptism should have been brought from London, consult the S. P. C. K. History of the Diocese of York, p. 135.

the

the N. E. pillar is a well, 3 feet in diameter, and 45 feet deep, made to drain the spring which flows across this portion of the Church, and used to fill the Font, and serve for cleaning, and probably also for the use of the Clergy and inhabitants who took refuge in the Church during the Scotch raids." (Ib. pp. 22—23). It is not possible that men like the mediæval architects should have been ignorant of these springs, and that wells had to be sunk after the church was built, to drain them: it seems rather that like the case of Kirkoswald, the site of the Church was chosen on account of these wells which were so necessary to supply water for the various Sacramental functions.

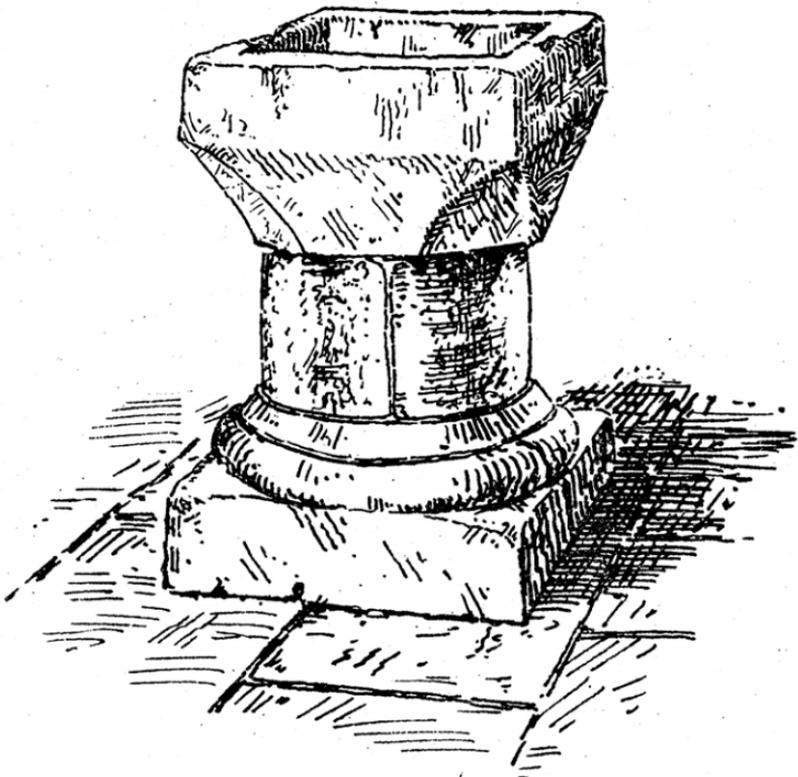
CROSBY ON EDEN.

The Font is Norman with a square bowl, not a very uncommon form in this period, with the lower part of the corners chamfered to meet a cylindrical stem. The whole rests on a square plinth, is of red sandstone and has a drain. The bowl bears evident marks of ill-usage, but one wonders that it is in such preservation, when we remember that Crosby Church is north of the Eden, and exposed to hazards during the Border feuds. When Bishop Nicolson visited it in October, 1703, he found the Font "pretty well". (*Miscellany Accounts*, p. 106). It must have fared worse since, probably in 1745, when, according to local tradition, the rebels stabled their horses in this as well as Stanwix Church. At all events the bowl is scored with deep lines, and one side has been manifestly used as the parish whetstone.* In the present church built in 1854, it stands in the north aisle, near the west door still retaining its paint and whitewash. I am informed that the old church was a plain, low, whitewashed building,

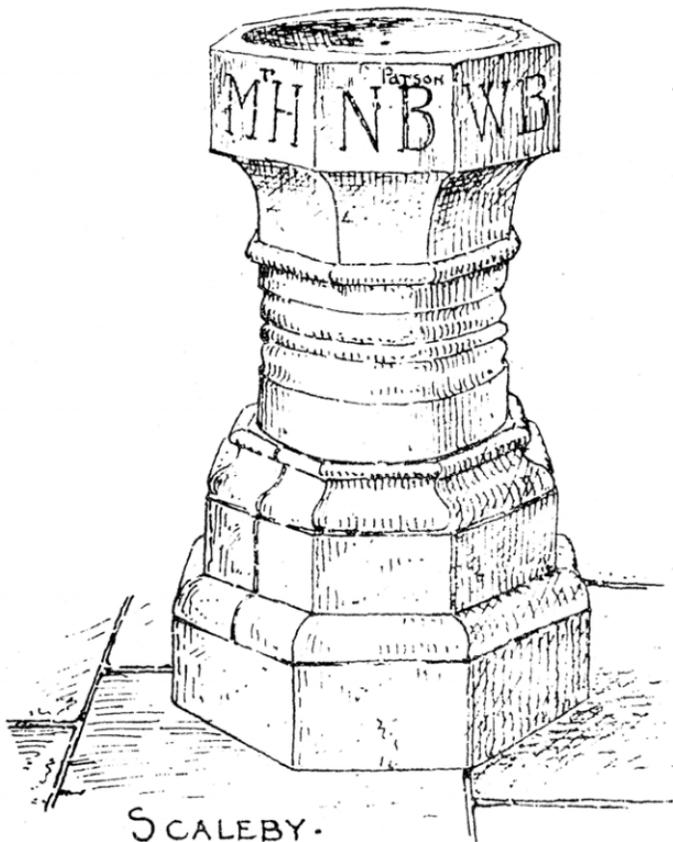
*NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—Bishop Nicolson says "Mr. Pearson the School-master, has no certain and fix'd Salary. He teaches the children in the Quire; where the Boys and Girls sit on good Wainscot Benches, and write on the Communion Table, too good (were it not appointed to a higher use) for such a service."

with

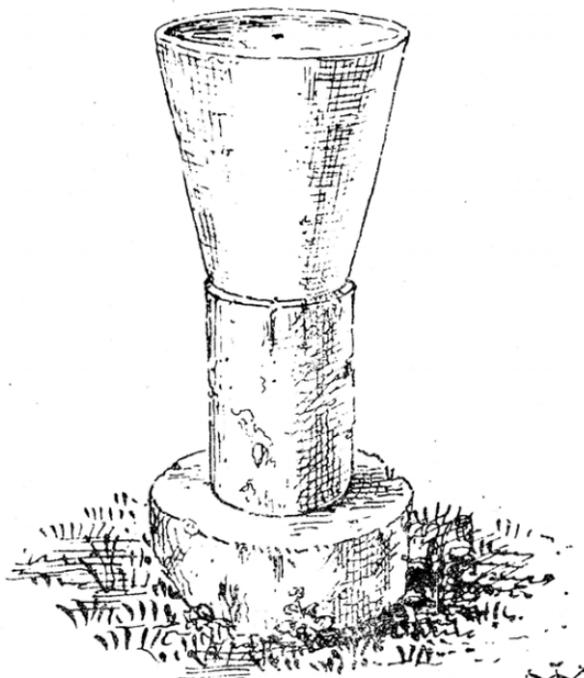
CROSBY-ON-EDEN.



J.W. BENWELL. DEL. MAY. 1887.



SCALEBY.



KIRKANDREWS-ON-EDEN.



with the usual three-decker and the choir seats placed within the communion rails. It was hardly fair to treat the memory of Bishop Smith in this way (*Miscellany Accounts*, Bishop Nicolson, p. 105.)

KIRKANDREWS ON EDEN.

This curious specimen, now in the rector's garden, is supposed to have been the Font used in the old Church of Kirkandrews on Eden. It was found, according to the oldest inhabitant, in that churchyard, and was brought to Beaumont where it served as the parish Font "for years and years." About 1875 it was supplanted by a new one, given by Mr. Hodgson (?) on the occasion of the baptism of his son. The present rector found it amongst some rubbish in one of the rectory out-offices, and has it placed near his door. He intends, I understand, to replace it in the churchyard of Beaumont when the restoration of that church is completed.

It consists of three parts, red sandstone, said by Dr. Bruce to be the several parts of a Roman mill. Very likely as

the churchyard at Kirkandrews is a mass of stones: it has probably been the site of a mile-castle. (*Handbook of the Roman Wall*, by Dr. Bruce, p. 231.)

SCALEBY.

After the Restoration in 1660, the services of the church were not conducted with decency and order in Scaleby. Rector Priestman may have been successful in Quaker-catching in his parish (*Carlisle Patriot*, Sept. 23, 1887) but he neglected the internal arrangement of his church and left a legacy of confusion to his successor. We make this extract from documents relating to Scaleby in the Bishop's Registry—

The presentment off the parish of Scalbey An: dom: 1684.
In prim. To the first Article off the Title off the book off visitation
exhibited

exhibited att the Bishop's last trienniall visitation we answer
That our church is so ffar frome being in good repair that it
is in noe wise fit for the publick worship off God.

2ly. We have noe Carpet cloath, surplice or pulpit cloath.

3ly. We have noe Church Bible, booke of Homilies or other bookes
required by the Canons off our Church.

This earnest representation to head-quarters does not seem to have improved matters. When Bishop Nicolson visited Scaleby in June, 1703, he reported a somewhat similar state of things, adding a new item "they want a Font". (*Miscellany Account* p. 5). This latter defect was soon supplied as we learn from the date on the present Font. It consists of an octangular bowl and base with a circular stem. Around the bowl is the following legend

Mr. H	Parson N. B.	W. B.	C. G.	Church Wardens	17	07		
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It may be of some interest to inquire to whom these initials belong. Mr. H. seems to be one of the Hetherington family of Kirkclinton, a name well known for benevolence and charity in many parts of the county. The Church-plate of Kirkclinton and Walton are marked with the initials F. H., and it is presumed with every probability of truth, that they were the gifts of Francis Hetherington, one of this family. (*O. C. P.* pp. 11 and 44). I find this note in one of the county histories.

The Hetheringtons are a very ancient Border family: and are remarkable, not only for having so long preserved the family estate, but for having produced sundry persons of note in their day: among others, the late Mr. Hetherington, who gave so large a sum of money in his lifetime, to found a charity for the relief of the blind, was descended from the Hetheringtons of Cumberland. And it appears that a George Hetherington was, in the reign of Henry VIII appointed to be King's bailiff, to keep watch and ward, in the parish of Kirkclinton, in the west marshes. (*Hutchinson's History of Cumberland*, vol. ii, 565.)

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It is not difficult to discover that N. B. are the initials of Nathaniel Bowey, who was also vicar of Crosby-on-Eden. Bowey was a pluralist of whom Bishop Nicolson had a small opinion.

The Register-book (if it may be call'd so) is most scandalous: being loose, in paper, and of no age. It looks like all the rest that's under the care of Mr. Bowey, the present vicar: who is an unhappy Manager of all his concerns, (*Miscellany Accts.* p. 106.)

The initials of the churchwardens I shall not attempt to decipher as I can find no contemporary document. The Parish Register begins in 1724 (*Gilpin Memoirs* p. 20), and, worse luck! there is a blank in the transcripts in the Bishop's Registry for some years preceding and following 1707. It may be noticed in this connection that there is added to the 1684 "presentment," from which the above is extracted, the following note

Noe Reg. Booke in the parish.

Just like Parson N. B. who managed things as badly here as at Crosby. The bowl is shallow without a drain and the whole Font is of an ugly yellowish colour. On one side there is a wedge of iron leaded into the bowl, which served probably as a book-rest. A small porcelain fontlet is used here contrary to Church of England tradition.

From the time of the Reformation to the days of Puritanic fury in the days of Charles I, there was a strong propensity to remove or neglect the Font and use a basin instead. This was checked as long as it was possible: thus in 1564 it was directed.

That the fonte be not removed, nor the Curate do baptize in the parishe churches in any basons, nor in anye other form then is alredie prescribed.

In 1571 it was directed Curabunt (oeditui) ut in singulis ecclesiis sit sacer fons, non pelvis, in quo baptismus ministretur, isque ut decenter et munde conservetur. (*Simpson's Ancient Baptismal Fonts* p. xvi.)

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This basin or pelvis, placed within the bowl of the Font, is used in several churches throughout the Diocese. Why such a strange ritual should be observed I do not know.

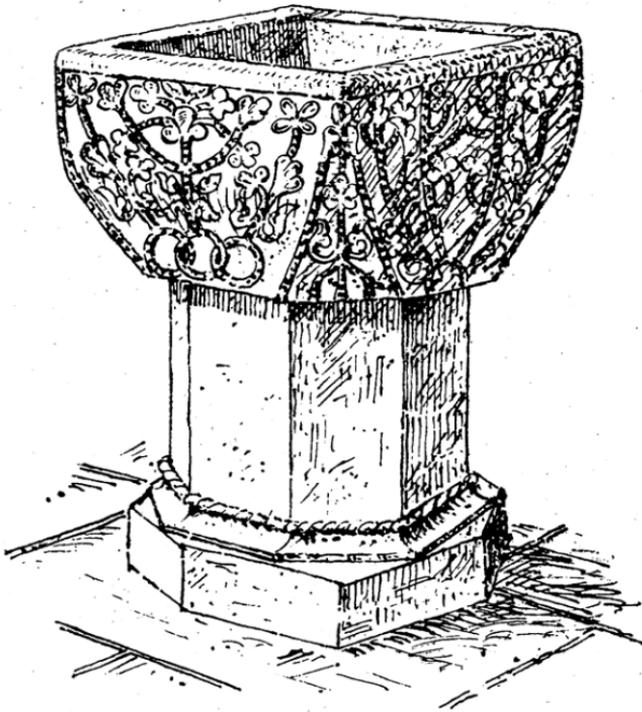
BOWNESS-ON-SOLWAY.

A Font often denotes the antiquity and frequently determines the former importance of the church, and is so essential a part of the edifice that it is incomplete without one. According to the rubrick a church may be without a pulpit but not without a Font: hence almost the first thing I look for in an old church is its old stone Font. (*Table Book* pt. i., 771).

Hone's opinion about the value and importance of the font to a church will be subscribed by most people and may be found very applicable to Bowness-on-Solway. Little seems to be known about the architecture of this Church.

Bowness Church, dedicated to St. Michael, is an ancient building, the date of whose erection is unknown, but the materials employed are generally said to have been brought from the Roman station. (*Whellan History of Cumberland*, 150.)

Evidences there are both in doors and windows which place the church in the Norman period, but the font is enough of itself to settle speculation in this direction. The east window seems to show that the present church is only the wreck of a larger and more magnificent building. If this opinion be correct Hone's remarks on fonts may not be considered much beside the truth. From the illustration it will be seen that the Bowness font is a rich specimen of Norman work. It stands near the principal entrance, in the centre of a square Georgian pew. The bowl, the only original part, is like Crosby-on-Eden, square, with corners chamfered to meet the stem. The raised ornamentation with which the whole bowl is covered is rude, well-defined, and may have symbolic meaning. On the west side, as given in the plate, it is quite



BOWNESS-ON-SOLWAY.

quite plain that we have the Vine, a figure of the Church, springing from three interlaced circles, the symbol of the Holy Trinity, and the whole signifying very appropriately the nature and effects of the Sacrament of Baptism. Interlaced bands run diagonally on the north side, the intersections forming a lozenge panel filled alternately with nail-heads and round pellets.

On the remaining sides and corners there is an irregular and floriated ornamentation. The moulding round the lip, very much broken, is now patched with pieces of red sandstone. It has, of course, the characteristic lead lining and the drain.

It is not a little curious that Bishop Nicolson omits to mention the Font when he visited Bowness on July 2, 1703. For that matter small use the parishioners could make of it, had it been above ground.

The Rector (Mr. Gerard Lowther) has remov'd all his Goods to Colby-leathes near Appleby, designing to fix his family there: and his Curate is also retired into Lancashire: so that, on Sunday last, they had no Service: nor do they know when they shall. (*Miscellany Accounts*, p. 21).

The Rev. S. Medicott informs me that according to local tradition, the bowl of the Font was dug up by John Wallace, the then sexton of Bowness, when making a grave in the beginning of this century. This seems probable enough, as it was seen by the Messrs. Lysons in 1808 "lying in a garden near the church." (*Lyson's Cumberland* cxiv). It was soon taken, says Mr. Medicott, from the churchyard into Mr. Hodgson's garden, where it is well remembered as standing for many years in use as a flower pot until presented to and put by him into the church. There can be little doubt that it was buried by some pious person to save it from desecration or more probably destruction, in times when every sacred relic of the church Catholic was set at nought.

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In 1848 the Norman bowl was placed by Mr. Hodgson on an octagonal stem with a square base. On the stem is a brass plate with this inscription.

Hunc Fontem
Ecclesia diu ejectum
Et in proximo horto collocatum
Deo et Ecclesiae
Restituendum curavit
Gulielmus Hodgson, Arm.
A.D. MDCCCXLVIII.

The Fonts in the remaining twelve churches of this Deanery are comparatively modern and of slender interest. That now in use at Kirkclinton is in the perpendicular style and of the same date as the present church. The previous Font has found a resting-place near the rectory door and is filled with clay and weeds. In Bishop Nicolson's time there was "no Font more than a small fragment of one that has been," but the church he then visited and the "fragment" have since disappeared. There are some relics of the old Norman Church still preserved: they are built into the interior of the tower. The scattered pieces of the Norman piers have been collected under the superintendance of Dr. Grant, the late rector, and erected in a sort of colonnade from the rectory to the church.

The Fonts at Arthuret and Burgh-on-Sands have no distinctive marks about them and so may be of any date. The bowl of the former is peculiar, being a lop-sided nonagon with a quadrangular basin, terminating narrowly at the drain. There is an indentation at the south angle about a foot broad, which might be caused by the drawing of the staples, or probably made for the hand of the priest when the cover was locked down. The base and bowl of the Burgh Font are of red sandstone and the shaft of grey: the bowl is octangular with a circular basin. The
cover

cover is an unornamental structure of oak fitting into a border chased round the margin of the bowl. The less said of the Font at Kirkandrews on Esk the better. Those at Grinsdale, Houghton, Rocliff, Nichol-forest, Blackford, and Holy Trinity, Carlisle, have no particular interest. Most of them are contemporary with the present churches which have been built within living memory. "The Font" in S. Mary's Church, Carlisle, "a circular white stone bowl, supported on fine marble shafts with carved capitals, and an appropriate text cut round the top, is the gift of Mr. Christian, the architect." (*Carlisle Patriot*, Jan. 28, 1870). In 1703 the Stanwix Font was "base and so low that 'tis troublesome for the minister to stoop to it." Of this there is no trace now; its place is taken by a modern structure, higher perhaps than its predecessors, but still not beautiful.

The illustrations have been pencilled by Mr. J. Wayland Benwell, of Carlisle, who has been kind enough to accompany me on my various pilgrimages in search of Fonts.