

ART. XXXIII. *The Baptismal Fonts of the Rural Deaneries of Gosforth and Whitehaven.* By the REV. J. WILSON, M.A., Vicar of Dalston.

Communicated at Lancaster, September 18th, 1890.

THESE rural deaneries cover the whole of the south western portion of the county of Cumberland, stretching along the seaboard from Harrington to Millom, comprising with Workington the ward of Allerdale-above-Derwent, and originally situated in the ancient deanery of Copeland, in "the great and famous" arch-deaconry of Richmond, and diocese of Chester. This portion of the county was annexed to the See of Carlisle under the provisions of 6 and 7 William IV, c. 77, and of an order in council dated the 10th of August 1847, which took effect on the death of Bishop Percy, in 1856. The deanery of Whitehaven, consisting of 15 benefices, is now in the arch-deaconry of Westmorland, while Gosforth with 21 benefices is in the recently created arch-deaconry of Furness. But it must be remembered that many of these benefices are either districts of modern partition, carved out of the old parishes, or chapelries raised to an independent ecclesiastical status. In the two deaneries there is not more than a score of parishes, which can lay claim to a distinct and separate history. This consideration is of importance in taking a general view of the fonts in our territorial area. It cannot be said, however, that these deaneries are rich in ancient and elaborate fonts, though there are some which, for their interest and peculiarity, will repay an attentive survey. Indeed, if I were bold enough to dogmatise, I might point to specimens characteristic of the chief periods of Gothic architecture amongst those I have ventured to illustrate.

But

But what has struck me most in the examination, is, the frequency with which fonts of the very worst description occur, either as still doing duty, or else discarded to make way for fonts of a better and more appropriate type. One is prepared to make allowances in matters of church furniture in these northern counties, as the poverty of the church and the unsettled state of society, owing to border troubles, are notorious. This reason will apply in some measure to Copeland, though not perhaps with so much force as to Gilsland and its neighbourhood, where ancient fonts are very scarce. Nothing can be said against those in Copeland which remain to us: they are in every way suitable to the purpose for which they were intended. I am referring rather to those introduced since the reformation which seem to prevail more, and to be of a more debased kind than I have noticed elsewhere in the county. The frequency of this style of font is enough to reflect discredit on the religious notions, and ecclesiastical order of the district previous to the great church revival of sixty years ago. After all, was not its position unfortunate if not unique? Far away from the arteries of church life, in the forests of Cumberland, yet not in the diocese of Carlisle, its chance of possessing an abundance of vital energy was very poor. A strange picture of its condition is given to us by one of its most famous sons, whose name will ever be linked with it to its honour. Edmund Grindal, Bishop of London, who always kept a sympathetic eye on his native district, writing in 1563 to Sir William Cecil, says:—

I have often thought to make a general suit to you for regard to that little angle where I was born, called Cowpland, parcel of Cumberland: the ignorantest part in religion and most oppressed of covetous landlords of any one part of this realm, to my knowledge (Remains of Abp. Grindal, pp. 256-7, Parker Society).

Notwithstanding these disadvantages the deaneries of Whitehaven and Gosforth have an interest all their own,
and

and make a very valuable contribution to the Baptismal Fonts in the modern Diocese of Carlisle.

GOSFORTH.

The parish of Gosforth has wiped off the stigma which Jefferson fastened on it in 1842, when he wrote about the font in the church :—

The font is uncanonical both in size and position; it is not sufficiently capacious and it is placed near the altar (*Allerdale Ward above Derwent* p. 301).

At this time a similar charge might have been brought with equal truth against many churches up and down the country, and though great advances have been made in the past half century, there are still places which could follow the example of Gosforth with propriety and advantage. The present rubric in the book of Common Prayer, which is but a summary of the canon law, requires the font to be large enough for the immersion of the child.* The primary charge of the church of England is that the minister of baptism “shall *dip* it in the water discreetly and warily.” The alternative mode, recognised by our church at the discretion of the god-parents, is baptism by affusion, as the next rubric directs “if they certify that the child is weak, it shall suffice to *pour* water upon it.” Out of this permission in cases of weakness grew the modern practice of baptism by affusion, which is now universal in the church of England, unsanctioned though it be in her con-

* Bingham, writing of the practice of immersion in the early church, says :—“Indeed the church was so punctual to this rule, that we never read of any exception made to it in ordinary cases, no not in the baptisms of infants” (*Antiquities* Vol. III, chap. xi, Sect. 5, p. 275, edition 1834).

The capacity of the font for this purpose, is thus insisted on by Archbishop Edmund in his Constitutions of 1236 :—*Baptisterium habeatur in qualibet ecclesia Baptismali lapideum vel aliud competens quod decenter co-operiatur & reverenter observetur & in alios usus non convertatur.*

Lyndwood who died in 1446, explains *competens* as—“sic quod Baptizandus possit in eo mergi” (*Provinciale*, lib. III, tit. 24, p. 241, edition 1679).

Erasmus who wrote so late as *temp.* Henry VIII, speaking of the usage in different countries, says :—*perfunduntur apud nos, merguntur apud Anglos.*

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stitution, and clearly contrary to her custom in both primitive and mediæval days.

The inclination of the people carried the practice against the Rubric, which still required *dipping*, except in case of weakness. So that in the later times of Queen Elizabeth, and during the reign of King James and of King Charles I, very few children were dipped in the font (Wall's *History of Infant Baptism*, part II, chap. ix) *.

If the early Stuart practice sanctioned this violation of principle, as time went on a greater enormity was introduced in the custom of baptism by aspersion or sprinkling which became prevalent in the Georgian period. This mode, which had taken root in the church without a vestige of authority †, was the means of bringing in a debased class of fonts which became very common, but which, I am thankful to say, is fast disappearing from use. Wall, who flourished 1674-1728, deplors this departure from the ancient practice.

The fonts that have been built since the times I speak of are, many of them, built so small and so basin-like, that a child cannot well be dipped in them if it were desired (*History of Baptism, ibid*).

Out of many I am giving illustrations of two such specimens; one at Distington dated 1662, and the other at St. Bridget's, Beckermet, of date at least a century later.

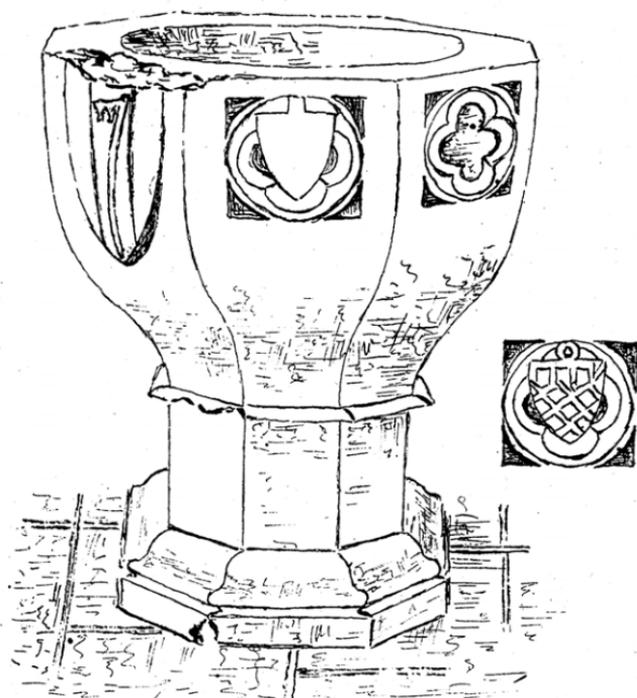
The position of the font is too long a story to be told here. The 81st canon of 1603, which is binding on the clergy, if not also on the laity, settles it as "in the ancient usual places", which our Bishop interprets and recom-

* It may be observed here that "the inclination of the people" spoken of by Dr. Wall, was initiated and supported, as Robinson, a nonconformist writer at the close of the last century, points out, "by such English or more strictly speaking Scotch exiles, as were disciples of Calvin at Geneva during the Marian persecution" (*History of Baptism*, p. 436).

Calvin, therefore, is the father of our present mode of Holy Baptism!

† Except of course in clinic baptism: I am speaking of the general custom in ordinary cases throughout.

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MILLOM.

mends as "near the chief entrance of the church" (*Guide to the Parish Church*, p. 189, edition, 1878).

The donor of the present font at Gosforth is Admiral Scott, of Harecroft, whose widow was the means of restoring the ancient font to Eskdale. It is octagonal and stands in a small recess or baptistery with groined roof in the vestibule of the church. The bowl is ornamented with quatrefoils and the shaft with perpendicular panels somewhat like Dalston, near Carlisle: the oaken cover is surmounted with a cross.

MILLOM.

The parish church of Millom furnishes a font which has points of difficulty as well as of interest. It is octagonal with a basin larger than usual, the interior being two feet in width, no lead lining, no drain, but with staple marks, placed a little to the west of the north door, consisting of two blocks of red sandstone and ornamented with quatrefoils and shields. The printed matter I have seen concerning it, forbears to enter into particulars, and agrees with Jefferson's allusion to it.

A gallery at the west end contains an organ. Below this is an octagonal stone font, ornamented with quatrefoils and a shield charged with the arms of Hudleston and a label (*Allerdale Ward above Derwent*, p. 167).

The shield of the Hudleston family may be found about the adjoining castle and churchyard as well as on the font, but as far as I know without the label. Between this panel and another of the same character without any emblazonment, there is a large shield raised from the bowl and extending below the swell. Though the chief or top of this shield is much broken, enough is left to show what it was. As far as one can see, it is charged in a manner
similar

similar to the shield on the font * at Dalton in Furness—*on a pale a crozier*—which is the ancient arms of Furness Abbey.

If we remember that the church of Millom was given to Furness Abbey in 1228, and remained in that impropriation till the Tudor changes, we shall have no difficulty in explaining the presence of this shield on the font. To be more explicit—

The church of Millom was given to the abbey of Furness, in the year 1228: one moiety whereof was appropriated by the archbishop of York to that monastery who were to present to the vicarage: the other moiety the archbishop reserved to his own disposition, and in the year 1230 he assigned it for the maintenance of three chaplains with clerks and other charges for his chantry ordained at the altar of St. Nicolas, in the cathedral church of York (Nicolson and Burn's *History of Cumberland*, Vol. II, p. 14).

The five remaining sides have each a circular sunk panel with a quatrefoil. The absence of a drain is a singular feature which deserves attention; there is also no indication that a lead lining has been ever used. From these peculiarities I gather, notwithstanding the staple-marks, that the font is of comparatively modern date.

There seems little doubt that almost all ancient fonts were lined with lead, and furnished with a plug and drain, which usually carried the water into a small dry tank immediately underneath (*Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts* by F. A. Paley, p. 24).

It may be safe to say, though I do so with diffidence, that the font is not earlier than the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The remaining fonts in this ancient parish are of no great interest. St. George's is capacious and coeval with

* Transactions Vol. viii, p. 120, where there is a drawing of Dalton Font. Compare also Hutchinson's *History* Vol. I, p. 523, where the arms and seal of Furness Abbey are illustrated.

the

the erection of the church in 1877. In the chapel of Thwaites which was built in 1853-4, according to Whellan *in loco*, "the pulpit and the font are of Caen stone, both handsomely carved: the latter is sufficiently large for immersion, and is supported by four columns of Purbeck marble". As for "the Kirk of Ulpha", situated where

The summits hoar
Of distant moonlit mountains faintly shine,
Sooth'd by the unseen river's gentle roar.

"the old octagonal stone font is built into an archway in the south wall of the church" (*Gosforth Deanery*, p. 140).

CORNEY.

The little church of Corney is indebted for its font to the late dean of Rochester, Robert Scott, D.D., better known perhaps as joint author of Liddell and Scott's famous Greek Lexicon. It is placed on the north side of the west door, and is both capacious and handsome. The bowl is circular, belted with a raised double band two inches apart and a legend between: the legend is apparently a copy in English of that on the font in the neighbouring church of Bootle, of which the dean's father had been rector for thirteen years.

✠ IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND
OF THE HOLY GHOST AMEN. R. S. 1882.

The older font is to be found (1887), not in the church nor yet in the churchyard, but as a flower pot stand in a farm garden up the valley, belonging to a former churchwarden. It is of the usual octagonal type, with no particular interest attached to it, except perhaps that the drain does not go through the stem but through the side of the bowl. Its base had been long missing till I discovered

covered it built as a capital of a gate-post near the old rectory.

ST. BEES.

After the dissolution of the religious houses by Henry VIII, the priory of St. Bees fell into ruins, and so continued till 1611, when the want of a parish church was felt and it was fitted up for that purpose. Instead of following the old arrangement, the altar was placed at the west end against a wall, apparently built one bay from the fine Norman doorway, and the entrance was made through the ruined chancel, where perhaps the font would find a place. Thus matters remained till 1820, when "the altar was removed to the east end of the nave", and "the font set in an appropriate place" near the west entrance. This font, which is hexagonal and "of uncertain date, probably the 17th century", is now in Cleator church, where it is surmounted by a tall cover, carved by Rattee and presented by the late Captain Fitchet. Very probably this font is of the date of the rebuilding of the priory, in 1611.

In 1855 when the transepts were re-roofed and added to the parish church, a true restoration was carried out under the care and from the designs of Mr. Butterfield, and many presents for the internal fittings were made: among them, "a grand hexagonal font presented by the contractor, Mr. Howes". It is very capacious, has a drain and leans against the most western pillar of the north arcade.* If the mother church can boast only of so modern a font, much cannot be expected of the several chapelries, or comparatively new parishes, situated in her ancient territorial boundaries. In the churches of Whitehaven, if the fonts are of recent date, they are everything

* Much of the above information is gathered from the introduction to St. Bees College Calendar, which was written, I believe, by Canon Knowles.

that

that can be desired in point of decency and order. St. Nicholas is a gift from the architect of that splendid church, Mr. Charles J. Ferguson, F.S.A. : Shap granite, with round bowl and octagonal vase. The shape of St. James is that of a magnified champagne glass : a brass plate records the name of the donor.

D. O. M.

Presented to this church by George Cavendish Bentinck, M.P., for this borough, in memory of his aunt Elizabeth, second daughter of William, 2nd Earl of Lonsdale, K.G.

The previous font, the vicar informs me, was a small one of stone, and given away by the churchwardens after they had received Mr. Bentinck's gift. A brass plate identifies Holy Trinity, which is very elaborate in text and symbolic device :—

This font is the gift of the relatives of Mary wife of Canon Dalton, vicar, in affectionate remembrance of her loving interest in the young of this parish. Born March 2nd, 1815, died Feb. 6th. 1874.

I have learned nothing of interest about the fonts in Christ church and Hensingham. In the churchyard so sacred to "the homely priest of Ennerdale", lies the old font behind the church near the "bare wing of mossy wall". It is of a type common enough in Cumberland churches a century ago, of which I have given an illustration from St. Bridget's Beckermeth, a square pillar tapering to the bowl, the interior of which is not so capacious as a good sized sugar-basin. If the font in use has changed since the days of Wordsworth, so has the appearance of the churchyard; of the latter it cannot now be said :—

In our churchyard
Is neither epitaph, nor monument,
Tombstone nor name—only the turf we tread
And a few natural graves.

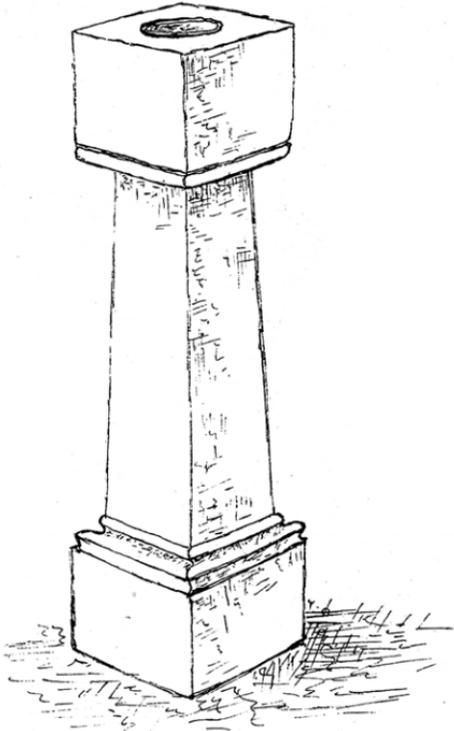
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The font at Netherwasdale, “ which is of stone and handsomely carved, was erected in 1855, at the expense of Mrs. Rawson ” (Whellan’s *History of Cumberland* p.439). It is almost a fac-simile of Haile and the vestry font of St. John’s, Beckermeth; they appear to have been executed from the same pattern, and probably by the same chisel. Though there is some difference in detail, each of them may be characterized as *simplex munditiis*, the only ornament of the square bowl being a maltese cross in a sunk panel. At Wasdale Head the font in use is hexagonal, of conventional dimensions. Its predecessor is still carefully preserved within the church, and is made an object of interest during the tourist season. Various opinions have reached me as to its probable antiquity, some prudent and others foolish. A very reasonable allusion to it is this ;—

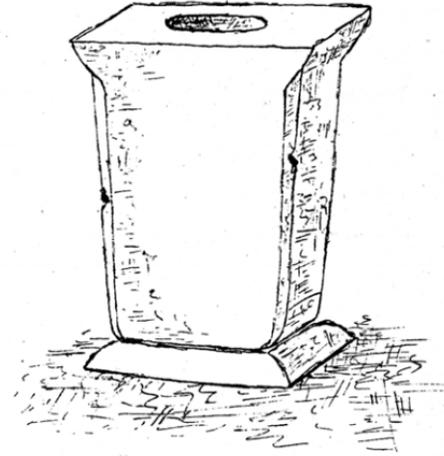
The font is very singular, being under two feet in height, square with a projection at each corner at the top, and tapering somewhat towards the foot : it is of red sandstone (*Gosforth Deanery*, p. 68).

The square stone which covers the basin or orifice and which is pointed out to tourists as “ the antiquarian lid ”, in the same manner as the font itself is said to be “ of Pre-Saxon date ”, is without doubt the base, and ought to be placed as as I have shown it in the accompanying sketch. It is of novel shape, poor and commonplace, much like the disused font (if it has ever been a font) in a cottage garden, near the church of Over Denton in Gilsland.

But the most interesting font in the ancient and extensive parish of St. Bees—the largest in the county according to Whellan—is to be found in the parish of Eskdale. The only original part is the bowl, which is like Harrington octagonal and prism-shaped with a drain and staple-marks, having one side broken. The interior is circular with a
fiat



S. Bridget's Beckermes.



Wasdale Head.

flat bottom and thin sides, : the lead lining has long since disappeared, though the bevelled edge around the lip marks its former existence. Apart from external ornamentation, it so resembles Harrington, that one is inclined to trace both to the same influence. A glance at the font will be sufficient to show that it has passed through many vicissitudes and has been used for purposes other than sacred.

The ancient octagonal font, seemingly of the same date as the east window (1330), stands at the west end. It has a history, having been for many years cast out and used for farm purposes, apparently about 1814, as in that year the chapelwardens enter in their accounts "Font, iis". It was recognised and restored to the church in 1876, and mounted on a new base inscribed "Suffer little children to come unto me", all being done at the expense of Frances, widow of the late Rear Admiral Francis Scott, C.B., Harecroft, Gosforth (*Gosforth Deanery*, pp. 96-7).

The name of the farm where the font was recognised * is Church House, where the present owner (1887) remembers it as standing in his father's farmyard over sixty ago, and at that time being used for very vile purposes. No tradition is known in that family to account for its removal from the church. I was informed in the valley that before its restoration there was "a sma' littel summat" which held a basin near the communion table, from which the children were baptized. The old font is now in its proper place near the south door on a new stem and base: on the platform which is elongated to the west there is a brass plate with this inscription:—

Restored to the Glory of God,
and in loving memory of
Admiral Francis Scott, C.B.

* By Rev. W. S. Calverley, at that time curate of Eskdale.

whilst

whilst round the octagonal base is incised the text given above.

It would be possible to give similar examples of chequered history, where the font has been alienated from the church for years, perhaps for centuries, and afterwards restored to hallowed uses. As I desire to draw attention to the unhappy fate and yet the happy restoration of the Eskdale font, I may be permitted to instance an analogous case if it were only to stimulate a worthy imitation.

At the beginning of the present century when a rage for *cleansing* churches (as it was called), by means of whitewashing them, fired the minds of rural churchwardens: when also it seemed good to them to remove ancient fonts, and to fill their places with little basins, the antique font in Harrow church was literally cast out of the sacred edifice, and allowed to roll about in the adjacent burial-ground. Here, after the leaden lining had been torn out and disposed of, it might have remained until, battered and weather-worn, it perished altogether. Fortunately, however, a lady, who at that time occupied the vicarage house happened to observe the deplorable condition to which the font had been reduced: and, having obtained possession of it, placed it in her garden, hoping that in due time, if kept in security, it might be restored to its proper position in the church. Thus after an interval of many years—during which it was clad with ivy and protected from the weather in a sheltered nook—it was, on the restoration of the church, reclaimed: and, being polished and mounted on a suitable block of stone, occupies once more its appropriate place, and forms a prominent and interesting feature in that beautiful structure (*Antiquary*, Vol. xvi, p. 220).

The peculiarity of the Eskdale font is a feature of the ornamentation, which I take to be the wheel, emblem of St. Catherine, virgin and martyr, to whom the church is dedicated. For the reason and date of this dedication, so rare in the north of England, I may refer you to a paper by my learned friend, the Rev. Thomas Lees, F.S.A., in these Transactions (Vol. xi, p. 50). Besides the testimony of the font “some of the windows contain stained-glass among which is conspicuous the figure of the patron saint
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and her wheel" (*Allerdale Ward above Derwent*, p. 424); this old glass was unfortunately lost at the dismantling of the church, in 1881. There is a holy well, known as St. Catherine's, just outside the churchyard wall, and I am informed that the Saint's name is found in Lombardic letters on one of the bells. This is an instance where the dedication of the church is sufficiently well authenticated, notwithstanding some views recently expressed by a reviewer in the *Athenæum*. Perhaps the warning may be useful.

Mr. Bates has contributed a learned paper on the dedications of the old churches of the diocese of Newcastle. It is an intricate subject, into which ignorant compilers during the last century have introduced much needless confusion. Dedications to saints were a reality in times when their invocation was a part of the national religion: when the Tudor changes took place they became forgotten except when kept in memory by great feasts and fairs. It should, therefore, be borne in mind by all antiquaries that no information on the matter can be held to be trustworthy that does not extend back to a period beyond the Reformation. No one who has not studied this branch of mediæval lore can imagine how much light the dedication of a church will often throw on past times, and on the sympathies of those by whom the church was built. Mr. Bates says, that when a mediæval bell exists with an invocation of a saint thereon, we have sometimes here a key to the dedication of the church. Such is not the case. In fact, it seems to have been more commonly the custom to avoid dedicating the bells to the saint who gave his name to the church. Holy wells, too, have been often considered to furnish the information required: but if used for this purpose the information they give is commonly misleading. The most authentic sources of knowledge on this subject, are the wills of those who desired to be buried in this or that church or adjoining churchyard. Its dedication is commonly, though not always, given (*Athenæum*, Sept. 20th, pp. 391-2).

As allusions to St. Catherine are so numerous in and about this church, and as there is only one other similar dedication in the diocese of Carlisle, if we except the chantry in Carlisle Cathedral, I may be excused giving what Mrs. Jameson says on the devotional representations of this saint.

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As patroness she has many attributes ; she bears the palm as martyr : the sword expresses the manner of her death : the crown is hers of right as sovereign princess : she holds the book as significant of her learning : she tramples on the pagan tyrant. All these attributes may be found in the effigies of other saints : but the special and peculiar attribute of St. Catherine is the wheel. When entire it is the emblem of torture to which she was exposed : in the later pictures it is oftener broken : it is then an historical attribute, it represents the instrument by which she was to have been tortured, and the miracle through which she was redeemed. She leans upon it, or it lies at her feet, or an angel bears it over her head. In Raphael's St. Catherine, in our National Gallery, she leans on the wheel, and no other attribute is introduced : this, however, is very uncommon ; the characteristic sword and the book* are generally present, even where the crown and palm are omitted (*Sacred and Legendary Art*, Vol. II, p. 88).

In this charming valley with its small population baptisms are not frequent, but a century or more ago when an occasion of this nature did occur we get a beautiful picture, no doubt sometimes abused, of the patriarchal mode of life, when the whole community assembled at the christening (*Hutchinson's History of Cumberland*, Vol. I, p. 579).

HARRINGTON.

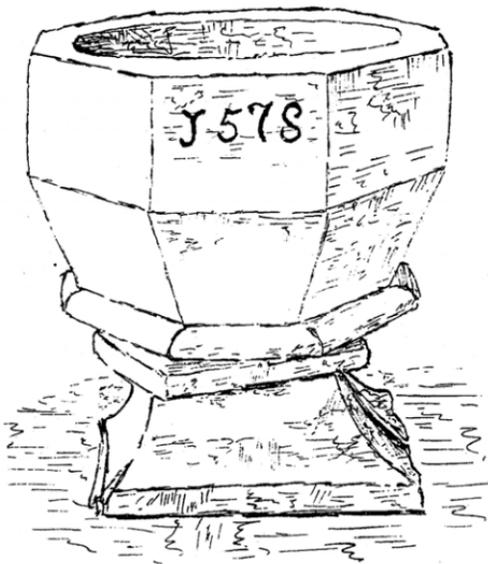
The font now in use in Harrington Church is modern and of the usual octagonal shape, given by the father of the present rector, the Rev. A. F. Curwen, on his appointment to the charge of the parish, and bearing date

Octr. 4th,
MDCCLXII.

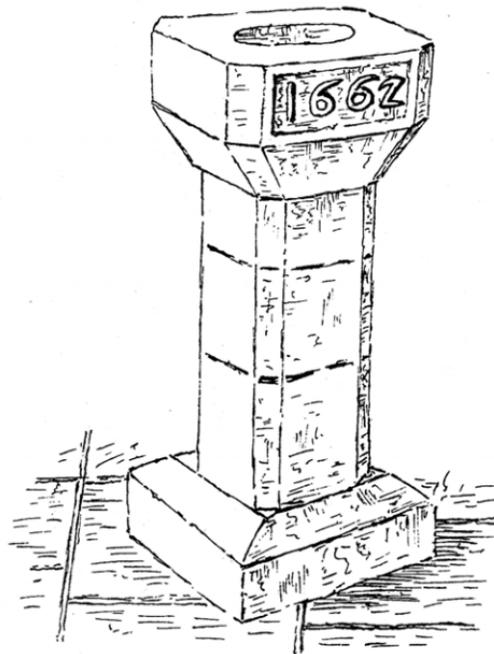
In reference to this font and its immediate predecessor, I take a few sentences from an interesting speech made by Mr. Curwen at the opening of a bazaar as reported in the

* The sword and wheel are her emblems in the east window of Bowness Church, Windermere. See *Windermere (Bowness) Parish Church and its old glass*. These *Transactions*, Vol. iv, pp. 44-75.

Cumberland



ARLECDON.



DISTINGTON.

Cumberland Pacquet of Sept. 8th, 1887. Reviewing his work of "just a quarter of a century this month, since he had the pleasure of coming to live among them", he said :—

At that time their parish church was in a different position from what it was now. They had a church, it was true, which was dear to many of them from old associations, but it was a damp and very ugly building, very unsuitable to the wants of the people. The font at that time was merely a hole cut in the sill of the east window : the communion plate was old battered pewter : and they had a harmonium. This was all changed now. They began with a new and handsome font : the pewter was turned into silver : and the harmonium gave way to a good organ : finally the old church was swept away and the present commodious structure in which they worshipped was erected.

It may seem a little strange that the ancient font, which we find now on a cubical block of stone in the vestibule of the church, should have been overlooked in or before the year 1862, seeing that it is of rare form and at least of thirteenth century date : indeed a good authority on these matters thinks he sees in it traces of Norman influence, and is inclined to place it in the opening years of the Lancet period. But through the kindness of the rector I am able to give a satisfactory explanation of the oversight. Writing to me he says :—

When I came to Harrington I found the old font built into the wall of the tower, on the south side, in such a manner that the bottom of it was flush with the outside of the wall, and the lip with the inside : it was used for holding the ropes for lowering coffins. I need not say that I at once rescued it, and would have replaced it in the church if it had not been that my father had just presented the church with the present font. It is 12th century work and the design shows what the original church must have been like, as in pulling it down to rebuild in 1884, we found many fragments of pillars of just such work : also a Roman altar on which is PRAEF COH II LING. This is now at Netherhall.

Like the font in Eskdale church, with which it has many features in common, it is octagonal and prism-shaped,
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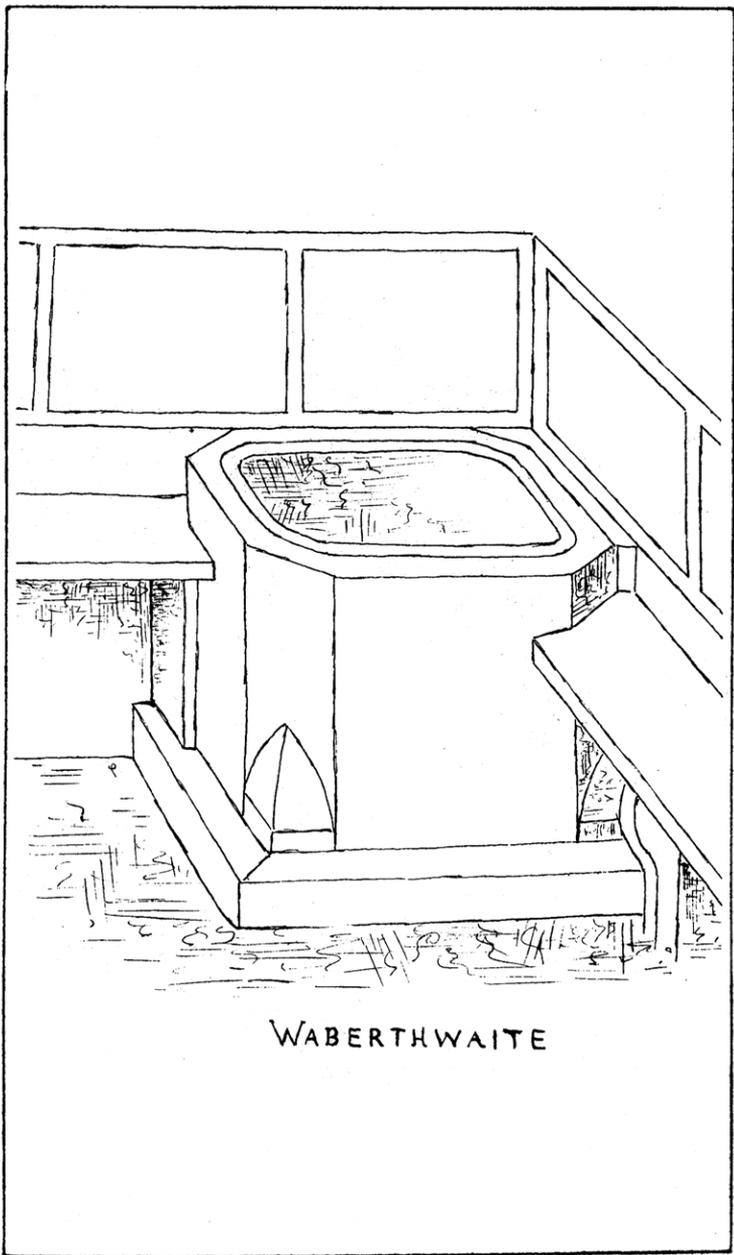
with circular basin, flat-bottom, and thin sides. Though the lip of the bowl is much mutilated, the old adjuncts of the lid or cover—the marks of the hinges and the iron staple to secure the hasp or lock—remain *in situ*. The ornamentation is a plain pointed arcade of interlaced arches encircling the font, with a conventional flower filling in the alternate spandrels.

From the illustration it will be seen that a date, in the characteristic figures of the period, is incised on one of the faces of the bowl, but this must be a later addition and cannot refer to the original production of the font. The date seems rather to record some rebuilding or restoration of the church: probably the rebuilding of the tower in the 17th century, when the font found a place in its south wall. To support this conclusion I may notice that “the tower contains one bell, with the date 1670” (Jefferson’s *Allerdale Ward above Derwent*, p. 11).

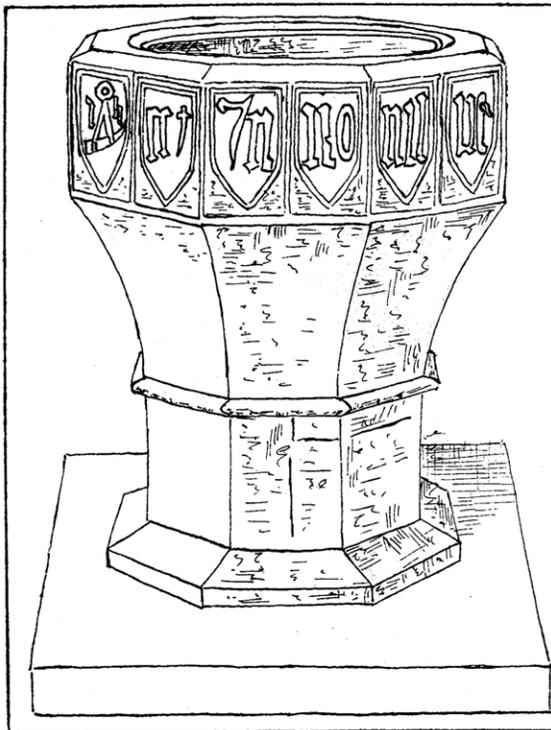
WABERTHWAITE.

The church of Waberthwaite has a font with all the characteristics of very early workmanship. It is one of the rudest specimens I have seen in the diocese, akin to those of Gilcruix and Crosby-on-Eden in the massive plainness of its style: a rectangular block of red sandstone with a drain, lead lining, and staple marks. As it has no stem, “it sits” behind the south door, buried in a square pew, the margin of the bowl just appearing above the seat.

At the time of church “restorations”, fonts of this description have to run the gauntlet, as their very existence is imperilled: correct people are always ready to discard the rude block of stone, no matter how much bound up with the most sacred traditions of the parish, and to substitute a modern article with tawdry ornamentation and little beauty. As churchwardens are great sinners in
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WABERTHWAITE



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BOOTLE

their treatment of ancient fonts, this warning, I hope, will be in good time to those "officers of the ordinary", in the parish of Waberthwaite, that their Norman font may be raised on a fitting shaft, and preserved in their interesting little church after its much needed repair.

BOOTLE.

The font in Bootle church has received some attention from local antiquaries, owing chiefly to its somewhat obscure inscription. In this way it furnishes a parallel to the fonts at Bridekirk and Crosthwaite in this county, as well as to many others in England. It bears some resemblance to that at Bourn in Lincolnshire, which is of perpendicular date, and to which the inscription approximates in meaning: like Threckingham also in the same county it affords a puzzle over which

With sharpen'd sight, pale antiquaries pore

and have pored in vain, as no satisfactory explanation has yet been given. With regard to the custom of putting inscriptions on fonts, Mr. F. A. Paley thinks that "perpendicular fonts more frequently than any other exhibit this peculiarity". After giving several examples, he says:—

The beauty and appropriateness of this kind of decoration no one will dispute. A legend, whether dedicatory or scriptural, is a becoming way of conveying instruction or commemorating an act of pious beneficence (*Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts*, p. 27).

But however beautiful or appropriate, it is not always easy to decipher the inscription, specially when enigmatic lettering or initials form the whole or part of it. As the font has produced some difference of opinion it may be of interest if I notice the chief historic references.

The

The first allusion I find is by Hutchinson in 1794, by whom the font is figured and the inscription given at length with tolerable accuracy (*History of Cumberland*, Vol. I, p. 523). What he proceeds to say concerning it is quite another matter:—

The church was lately repaired, being reputed to be a very ancient structure. The font is a large basin, formed of black marble or porphyry, of an octagonal form: on each square or face are two shields, raised from the plane, bearing characters in the old English letter, in some parts mixed with the Saxon.

The emblematical anchor in the third shield is rather singular, as it stands for the word *Salvator*. The letters R.B. in the two first shields denote the benefactor who gave the font, or the stonemason who executed the work. The character in the fourth shield we are not able to decypher (*Ibid*, Vol. I, p. 559).

No one who has seen the monument can subscribe his description of it, or his reading of the inscription.

Jefferson in 1842 gives his own version of it, and severely criticises Hutchinson for inaccuracy with regard to this font, though perhaps unnecessarily, as his own testimony is not quite unimpeachable. For the sake of clearness and comparison I quote the reference:—

The font, placed in a pew at the west end, is octagonal, with a capacious circular basin. It is quite plain, excepting a string-course round the centre. The top part, which is larger than the pedestal, bears eight (*sic*) shields, two on each side, with this inscription in text hand:—

In nomine patri & filii & spiritus sancti,

There are also the initials R.B., and on another shield a bugle horn and the initials, i.h. The former letters might be the initials of the lord of the seignory of Millom, or the incumbent, or the abbot of St Mary's at York to whom the church belonged. This font, which is of marble, has been (perhaps unnecessarily) painted. It is placed in a corner, so that six of its sides are now concealed by the walls and pews (*Allerdale Ward above Derwent*, pp. 132-5).

Whellan, 20 years later, adds little to our information except that he corrects Hutchinson and Jefferson as to the material

material of the font: he rightly calls it "red sandstone," which is very apparent now that it is divested of its successive coats of paint (*History of Cumberland*, p. 485).

The Rev. S. W. Watson, the amiable rector of the parish, who is always ready to point out the features of his church, is very judicious in his pronouncement on the obscurity of this inscription, and seems to me to have arrived at the most reasonable conclusion as far as it can be ascertained with certainty. He says:—

The chief object of interest in the church is the font, which has given rise to much discussion. It is octagonal in shape, standing three feet in height, and two feet six inches in diameter, with the following inscription on shields on six of its sides:—

"In nomine patri et filii et spirit' sancti a."

The seventh has R.B. in large letters, which it is thought are the initials of Richard Brown, rector of Bootle in 1535. The eighth has a bugle horn and i. h. and two other letters which have not yet been explained. As the lords of Millom carried a horn* for their arms, it may be gathered probably that the font was either presented to the church by J. Hudleston, lord of Millom, during R. Brown's incumbency, or by R. Brown in J. Hudleston's time. The handsome oak cover to this font was presented by the Rev. A. Wilkin. There is another small font or basin of black marble about 8 inches high, of which there is no record. †

* Confer "The Horn of Egremont Castle," by William Wordsworth, beginning

When the brothers reached the gateway,
Eustace pointed with his lance
To the horn which there was hanging:
Horn of the inheritance.

and concluding

Sons he had, saw sons of theirs:
And through ages, heirs of heirs,
A long posterity renowned,
Sounded the horn which they alone could sound.

† Procured perhaps by the puritan minister in the time of the Commonwealth in obedience to the *Directory* which had reformed fonts into basins. "The use was," according to Dr. Wall, "the minister continuing in his reading desk, the child was brought and held below him: and there was placed for that use a little basin of water about the bigness of a syllabub pot, into which the minister dipping his fingers and then holding his hand over the child's face, some drops would fall from his fingers on the child's face".

It

It is only necessary to call attention to our learned President's opinion, as it is already embodied in these Transactions, (Vol. ix, p. 121): he does not hazard an explanation of the difficult part of the legend though he is good enough to show what it does *not* mean. With such an example before me I shall not add to the multiplicity of versions: the fools of limited knowledge must not rush in where the angels of wide experience fear to tread. I had rather be content with giving a fac-simile of the inscription as it appears on the font, and leave to the curious the satisfaction of their own conclusions. This warning I may be permitted to add, that the last shield has evidently been tampered with: the chisel has been used to take away more than the paint, thereby causing much of the obscurity. (See appendix to this paper p. 359).

MORESBY.

The church of Moresby was built in 1882, on a site a little to the north of the ancient building and within the area of the Roman camp. The chancel arch* of the former church, early English pattern, is left *in statu quo* in the churchyard. The font which is now in the porch was taken from the old church, where it was attached to the wall: it is, if we believe the sexton who is the

* On this arch in the churchyard a brass plate is nailed with an inscription I have not yet seen in print. It may be useful to genealogists, if I give it here.

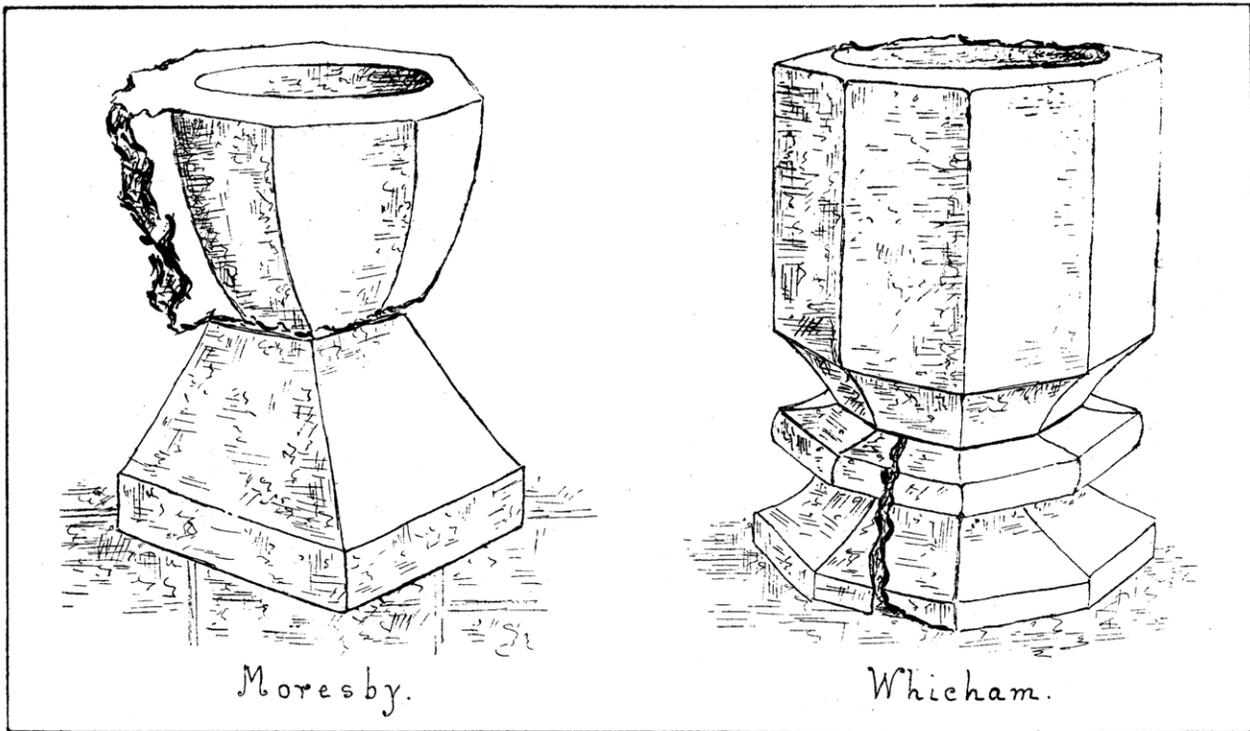
"Near this spot in the chancel of the old church were interred along with those of others of their families the remains of

William Fletcher
Henry Fletcher
Henry Fletcher
William Fletcher and
Thomas Fletcher

all of Moresby Hall, who from the year 1576 to about 1721 were successively (except the second Henry who died in his father's life-time) lords of the manor of Moresby, and patrons of this church. This plate is erected in place of one which was lost or destroyed when the old church was taken down, in 1822".

Whellan says the original brass was taken away out of the church about 1840, by some person unknown, and all clue to it lost (*History*, p. 422).

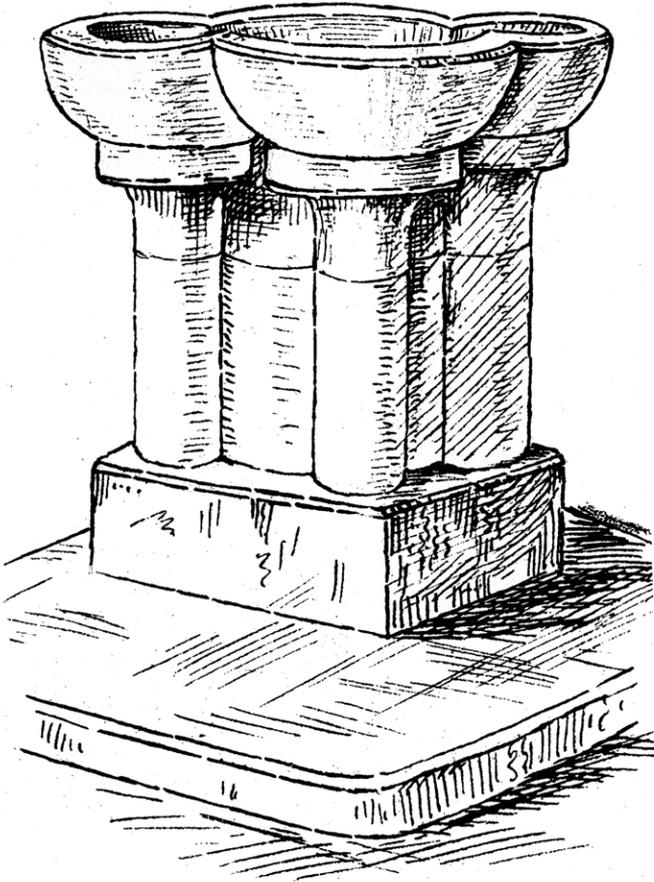
very



Moresby.

Whicham.

WHITBECK.



very embodiment of local tradition, about 700 years old. That it has been used as a font I have no doubt, but I am more inclined to say that it was originally a holy water stoup, of which it has many of the characteristics.

In this country a small niche with a stone basin was formed in the wall, either in the porch or within the church close to the door, or in one of the pillars nearest to the door as a receptacle for holy water but sometimes a vessel placed on a stand or pedestal was used: the niches resemble piscinas except that they differ in situation, are smaller and plainer, and very rarely have any hole in the bottom. (*Glossary of Architecture*, Vol. I, p. 448).

It is now balanced on a pyramidal block of stone, and used to stand on the north side of the principal entrance near the vestry door, where its place is usurped by a heating stove. The font in use is a marble pillar of very indifferent pattern, like that at Calderbridge: but the church authorities are procuring a proper font which will, I am told, be a credit to their church, and a fitting ornament to their neat little baptistery on the south side.

On each side of the chancel arch, which was built about five years ago, are figured the heads of two mitred prelates: on the south, Bishop Goodwin; on the north, Archbishop Thomson.

WHITBECK AND WHICHAM.

Under the shoulder of Black Comb, are the two little churches of Whitbeck and Whicham, of some interest in themselves and possessing fonts of which I have given illustrations. The Whitbeck font has a square appearance, consisting of a cluster of pillars with the capitals hollowed into a shallow quatrefoil to form the bowl. At some period of its history, one side was chiselled away to fit closely to the wall, which, now that it stands alone, makes it look lop-sided. It is of uncertain date, after the early English pattern,

pattern, painted a green stone colour, has a drain and is placed on a new platform opposite the west entrance. The font of Whicham is in very bad repair, may be of any date from the Reformation to Queen Anne, octagonal, with a deep bowl and narrow rim, red sandstone painted green.

DISTINGTON.

When the new church was built in Distington a few years ago, a marble font was presented and placed to the west of the south entrance. It calls for no special remark, except that its dimensions correspond to the requirements of the sacrament. It bears an appropriate text around the circular bowl :—

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Its predecessor is quite in keeping with religious notions prevalent in this northern diocese, and indeed everywhere in England, at the time of its introduction. It may be described as a square pillar of white sandstone, consisting of a long waist or stem chamfered almost into octagonal shape. The bowl which has a drain, lead lining, and chamfered edges, is ornamented on one side with a sunk panel, having in raised figures

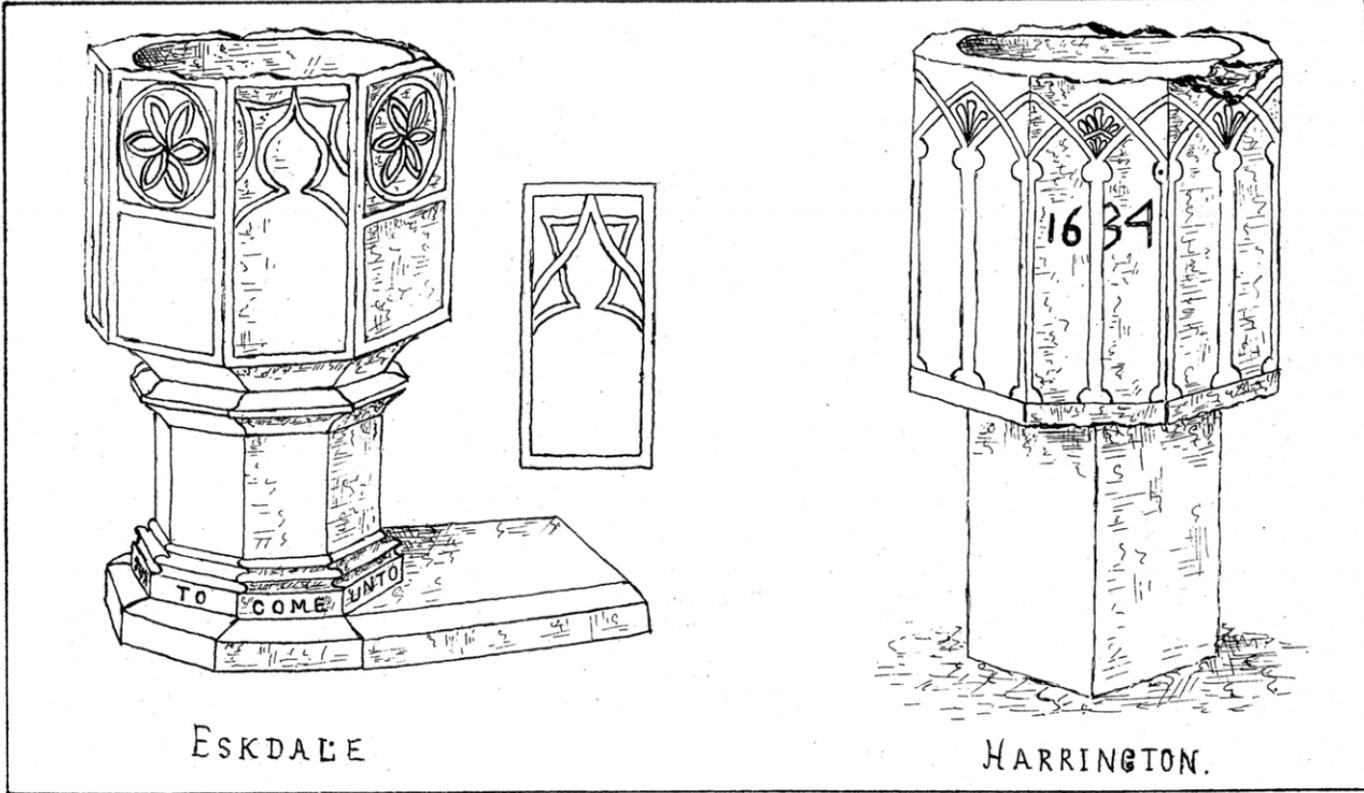
1662.

This font I found in the crypt amidst the debris of the last Easter decorations, the old pulpit, the barrel organ, and other survivals of the old church furniture. Half a century ago it was considered of some interest :—

There is a stone font of a square form, under the organ at the western end, which bears the date 1662 (*Allerdale Ward above Derwent*, p. 80).

I have ventured to drag it again into light, not that I should wish to see it replaced for any sacred purpose, but that I desire to illustrate a font characteristic of a period of church history.

ARLECDON.



ESKDALE

HARRINGTON.

ARLECDON.

Another font inscribed with a date is now doing duty as a flower pot, in the vegetable garden of Thomas Dixon Esq., of Rheda. It has been recently rescued from a stone wall in the neighbourhood of the church, and placed in its present position for safety. Forty years ago the Rev. F. J. Allnatt, who was then vicar of Arlecdon, remembers it acting in another capacity at a farmhouse in the parish: it was then used as a trough under a spout to catch rain-water from the roof. It is octagonal, of curious workmanship, with a well defined moulding at the base, resting on a square foot or plinth, chamfered to meet a stem, which is not forthcoming. The basin is of regulation size, but as it was filled with soil growing rare plants, it was not convenient for me to examine the interior. The character of the figures composing the date

1578

does not appear to be of that period, which makes me think that the date is either a later addition, or that the font itself is only a copy of a former monument. At all events it has received some rough usage. The present font in the church is a gift from Mr. Isaac Fletcher, of High House.

The remaining fonts in these deaneries do not call for a detailed description. In the churches of Irton and Drigg, the fonts are all that can be desired: that in the former church is situated in a baptistery, under the square tower at the west end, and bears this memorial on a brass plate:—

This font was erected in affectionate remembrance of R. W. Skeffington Lutwidge, Esq., Commissioner in Lunacy, who died at Salisbury, 28th of May 1873, from the result of a blow received from a lunatic whilst visiting the asylum near that city, by his nephew C. R. Fletcher Lutwidge, Esq., of Holmrook Hall.

The

The district of Beckermeth contains for our purpose three churches, which taken altogether may be said to possess an ample number of fonts. In St. John's, I noticed no less than three: the earliest, a pillar of the "syllabub pot" pattern, in the churchyard near the south door, which bears a family likeness to its neighbour at St. Bridget's, and a score of others in these deaneries: another in the vestry, akin to Haile and Netherwasdale: the third, now in use, the gift of Mrs. Howson, of Whitehaven. What shall I say of Calderbridge? Perhaps this much, that the vestry font of St. John's, if removed to this church, and placed in canonical position, which is not in the south transept, would be an immense improvement. It is a pleasure to meet with modern fonts like those in Ponsonby and Muncaster. Like Irton the font in Ponsonby church finds a place in the baptistery, at the west end near the north door and bears a memorial inscription:—

To the glory of God, and in loving memory of Samson and Mary Senhouse, and Sarah le Messurier.

while around the octagonal bowl is an appropriate text. The tradition of the place asserts that the old font, an unseemly one of wood, was destroyed when the new one was given. The same story comes from Muncaster, that the former font "was broken up mebbe to gravel the rroads wi", when the Lord Muncaster's gift was received some thirty years ago. This font is elaborately carved and emblazoned with several shields of arms, but without the necessary drain. Around the rim on a chamfered edge there is this legend in raised characters:—

Given to the church of St. Michael, at Muncaster, in grateful remembrance of the christening of his daughter, Margaret Susan Elizabeth, by Gamel Augustus Lord Muncaster, August. XXIXth, MDCCCLX.

The font in the church of Cleator Moor is the joint gift of the Sunday School scholars, and the children of John Stirling

Stirling, Esq., made in 1872, as I learn from a brass plate attached to the base. Lamplugh can boast of two fonts : that in the church which is modern and capacious, and another inside the rectory gates, “under the canopy of heaven”, filled with clay and weeds. This old font is plain octagonal, massive, and with a bowl, of at least 16th century date. Why it should have been discarded is a puzzle. In Egremont the font is a shell held in the hands and resting on the knee of an angel : it is placed in a neat little baptistery at the west end, and bears this inscription ;—

The font was dedicated to the glory of God, and in memory of their parents by the children of Thomas and Georgiana Elizabeth Hartley, of Gillfoot, A.D. 1883.

The Rev. W. E. Strickland, the late rector, supplies me with the following information about the fonts in this church :—

The font outside is a pillar capital hollowed for the purpose, about the year 1740. No tradition or trace of predecessor. The present font is peculiar and a copy of the one in Inverness Cathedral, which again is a copy of Thorvaldsen’s font in Copenhagen Cathedral.

In 1887 “the font outside” was standing in front of the west end of the church : in 1890 it was turned upside down amongst some rubbish near the entrance gate. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

The illustrations are by an amateur.

APPENDIX BY THE EDITOR.

Mr. H. Swainson Cowper, F.S.A., makes an ingenious conjecture as to the inscription on the Bootle font. He takes the legend to begin with R.B. thus making the difficult shield which comes last in Mr. Wilson’s version, to come number four, while the shield with 

is five. Mr. Cowper suggests that the mason intended to cut  on the fourth shield, but turned his template the wrong way, and so spoilt the shield: when he was told of his mistake, he commenced afresh on the the next shield. Opinions differ as to whether the characters on the fourth shield, as seen inverted in a looking glass, bear this out.
