

ART. VIII.—*The probable story of a fourteenth century font found in a farmyard in Upper Lunesdale.*
By ALEXANDER PEARSON.

THE Editor of the *Transactions* has asked me to send him some account of the acquisition by the parish church of Kirkby Lonsdale of an interesting fourteenth century font, which until recently, was occupying the undignified position of a receptacle for collecting water from a barn downspout in a hamlet called "High Oaks," which lies near Killington Bridge in Upper Lunesdale.

Such as it is, the account is here presented, not by a skilled archaeologist, but by an ordinary member of the public who is interested in local antiquities, and who has for long tried to discover whether there still existed, and if so where, the font, of most probably Norman period, which stood in the parish church of Kirkby Lonsdale up to the year 1686, when it was disposed of by the churchwardens, as appears from an entry in their accounts for that year which runs, "Received for the Old Font Stone 6d."

The record of this sale being mentioned in a book called "The Annals of Kirkby Lonsdale," caused a lady who happened to read it, and who was a member of the Society, to notify the vicar of that place that there could be seen in a certain farmyard at High Oaks, a heavy octagonal stone object, which she thought was very probably the missing font from Kirkby Lonsdale.

As I was the vicar's warden the information was passed on to me. The farmyard was visited, and there, standing against the barn wall, heavily bespattered with limewash and green with damp and age, was a handsome and obviously genuine font of early date.



Hole scooped out of inside of neck of Font.

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All that could be learned about it from the people who lived in the neighbourhood was that it had been in its present situation for over thirty years, and that it had been seen and examined by many; but nobody knew where it came from.

The font, which must weigh at least three hundred-weights, consists of a single block of stone, fashioned as to its top part into an octagonal shaped basin with a drain hole in its centre. The inside diameter of the basin is $20\frac{1}{2}$ inches, its depth has originally been $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the width of its sides 3 inches; but one of those sides has been worn down to a height of 5 inches, probably through long use as a whetstone for knives and axes, and the once square edge of the top of such side has been rounded and worn away to a width of $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, possibly through the rubbing necks of countless drinking animals.

The height of the font from top to bottom, which was originally 23 inches all round, is now 23 inches on one side and 21 inches on the other.

The circumference of the outside of the basin is 7 ft. 1 inch, and the eight upper panels or sides comprising its top part measure 8 inches deep by 10 inches wide, while those immediately below them are $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep and 9 inches wide.

The diameter of the stone below these last mentioned panels is 17 inches, and its interior has been scooped out so as to form a circular hole 9 inches deep and 10 inches wide, which looks as if it has been made to hold the top of the pedestal or base upon which the font originally stood.

Through one side of the basin a hole of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter has been cut, in order to allow a considerable flow of water to enter or escape through it for farmyard or domestic purposes, and possibly by means of a pipe.

On the top of the lip or edge of the basin, and opposite each other, two nicks have been cut, which may have been

for the purpose of keeping in place an iron bar on which a bucket could be stood. These nicks are not the marks so frequently found on pre-reformation fonts which show where iron staples for securing a lid or cover have at some time been wedged in with lead; for in the year 1236 Archbishop Edmund had ordered that baptismal fonts should be kept locked as a precaution against sorcery, and in 1305 Archbishop Winchelsey had required that the people should provide for their churches (among other things) a font with a lock and key.

It seemed almost certain that this could not be the font that was missing from Kirkby Lonsdale church. For one could hardly imagine that in a country where stone was abundant anyone would have troubled to cart such a very heavy object some $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles for the purpose of use as a water trough, when it would have been so much simpler to have got the nearest mason to make one on the spot; nor did it seem likely that anything of such crude design and workmanship could have come from that church where the ancient architectural features are all of outstanding beauty, or for that matter, and for similar reasons, from the handsome Norman church of Sedbergh either. But what did seem apparent, was, that here, in a district which had once formed part of the very large original parish of Kirkby Lonsdale, there was lying, in a neglected condition, a most important sacred furnishing of some ancient church or chapel which was once within that parish, and that it ought to be rescued; and that so far as its future was concerned, an exceedingly suitable home for it would be the mother church of Kirkby Lonsdale.

With regard to this original parish, the first part of its descriptive name is derived from the old Norse terms "kirkja," a church, and "byr," a farm, (p. 160. *Cumberland and Westmorland Place-names*, by Professor Sedgfield). In the Domesday Survey of 1086 the name is

written "Cherchebi" only, and without any Lonsdale. It was so described because Italian clerks were engaged in the compilation of that Survey and in the Italian language there is no letter *k*, and "Ch" before "e" is pronounced hard, e.g. Chetel for Ketel, (Dr. Farrer's *Domesday Survey of N. Lancashire*, 12 Lancs. & Ches. Antiq. Soc., vol. 18).

The second name, Lonsdale, is descriptive of the river valley, in which the town is situated, e.g. Kirkby Lonsdale for the church town in the valley of the river Lune, Kirkby Kendal, which was the old name of Kendal, for that in the valley of the Kent, and (query), Kirkby Stephen (or o't Eden) for that in the valley of the Eden.

As to its original size, the learned antiquary Dr. Whitaker makes the following statement in that part of his *History of Richmondshire* which relates to Lunesdale and the church and parish of Kirkby Lonsdale, "That it was the Saxon parent of all churches in this beautiful valley is evident from its distinctive name, which, at the time it was imposed plainly negated the existence of any other. When Christianity first extended itself over the thin and widely dispersed population of these northern valleys the site of a church would naturally be chosen with reference to the convenience of all, and supposing the whole vale to have constituted the original parish, what site could have been chosen more judiciously than Kirkby Lonsdale." A little further on he says "In like manner the whole vale of Lune appears to have been within the Saxon parish of Kirkby, for Kirkby, coupled with the name of a valley, implies that the place so denominated was at that time the only church town within the valley."

In due course the font was purchased and removed to Kirkby Lonsdale, and then began an interesting enquiry as to its age and place or origin.

The histories of all the churches and chapels in Upper Lunesdale were thoroughly gone into, as well as the particulars relating to every thirteenth or fourteenth

century font which could be found in the Society's *Transactions* from the date of their first publication; and, as the result of a process of elimination, it appeared to be a probability, almost amounting to a certainty that this one had been made in the fourteenth century for the chapel of Killington which was then an outlying chapel of ease of the mother parish church of Kirkby Lonsdale.

In the year 1260, in the reign of Henry III, Peter de Brus the Third granted to William de Pickering the manor of Killington, the first part of which place name is probably derived from the personal name "Chellinge."

During the fourteenth century, the Pickering who was lord of the manor at the time, erected for himself and his family, on the edge of a rocky ravine on the right bank of the river Lune, some seven miles north of Kirkby Lonsdale, a strong and handsome fortified hall which was equipped with a tower and a drawbridge and other protective devices, and was built of stone similar to that of the font.

Here this knightly family lived for 325 years, during which period members of such family married from time to time members of the wealthy and historical families of Harrington, de Roos, Lowther, Bellingham, Stapleton and others of equal importance.

Some time in the course of the fourteenth century, a chapel was built within a few yards of, and just opposite Killington Hall, for the convenience of the Lord of the Manor and his tenants and the people of the neighbouring district, and from the remains that are still in existence, it must once have had some quite handsome windows and doubtless other features of merit.

The consent of the Vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale would doubtless be required for its building, but one imagines that there would be no financial objections to this being given, as his parishioners in Killington and Firbank would still have to come to Kirkby Lonsdale for both funerals and weddings and make the accustomed payments for the

same, while so far as any christenings were concerned there were no baptismal fees. In all probability the Bishop would then be petitioned to consecrate the building, and this he would do on being satisfied that a sufficient endowment—known as a chapel salary—had been provided to remunerate the clergyman or reader who was in charge of the services there.

As the chapel was for the ease or convenience of those who wished to take part in prayer and to hear preachings, and who belonged not only to Killington but also to the adjoining division of Firbank, the salary was payable between these two divisions, and was fixed at 20 nobles, or £6 13s. 4d.

Such an apparently trivial payment was not quite so small as it seems, for in the fourteenth century the purchasing power of money was considerable, and a sheep could be bought for a shilling and a hen for a penny halfpenny.

This salary was then apportioned between, and charged on the various named pieces of land, which the authorities decided should in future share its cost; but as no part of it was charged on the demesne of the lord of the manor (that is the lands adjoining his house which he kept in his own hands, as distinguished from those distributed among his tenants), one may assume that he had given the site for the chapel, and that most probably he was also a substantial contributor of the money required for its building.

In or about the year 1585, the inhabitants of Killington and Firbank petitioned the Bishop of Chester for permission to make use of this chapel at Killington for the various purposes mentioned, and more particularly referred to, later on; but as they did not then ask for such chapel to be consecrated, one can assume that the reason why they did not do so was because its consecration had already taken place.

Assuming that this was a consecrated chapel, and one in which people of such standing as the Pickerings were interested, it is difficult to imagine that such a building would be without a font, although I have heard it stated that some of these outlying chapels of ease which were attended to by a reader, were not at their institution allowed to possess such a thing.

But Ingleton church, some seven miles distant from Kirkby Lonsdale, was once an outlying chapel of Bentham parish and it has a splendid Norman font. It is sculptured with interlaced arches and biblical figures, including those of the Virgin with the Christ Child, Joseph, the Magi, Herod, Rachel weeping for her children and several other subjects. This font was rescued from the river below the churchyard into which it had been thrown and was cleaned up and replaced in the church.

The churches of Bowness, (formerly known as Windermere), and Grasmere, have respectively thirteenth century and medieval fonts, and each of these Churches was originally an outlying chapel of the great parish of Kendal.

If the chapels of Ingleton Bowness and Grasmere each had a font, why should not the chapel of Killington have one too?

On page 771, Part I of Hone's Table Book, the writer of the paragraphs relating to churches and fonts says that a font is so essential a part of the edifice that it is incomplete without one, and that according to the rubric, a church may be without a pulpit but not without a font.

As there would seem to a layman to be little difference, so far as the essentials of its equipment was concerned, between a church and a consecrated chapel, it would seem to be a reasonable assumption that Killington chapel had a font in the fourteenth century.

In Bulmer's *History and Directory of Westmorland*, the writer of that part relating to Killington, after stating that

the chapel was originally erected by the Pickering family for the convenience of the residents of the Hall and the tenants of the manor in Killington and Firbank, continues as follows:—"The Reformation came with its sweeping changes, the old religion was prescribed, fines, imprisonments and even death were inflicted on the contumacious, but in these out of the way places it often died a hard and struggling death. The ancient chapel was disused and the inhabitants were dependant for religious consolation upon the stealthy visits of some seminary priest. The district was thinly populated and these missionary visits were few and far between. By 1585 the new creed had rooted and the inhabitants in conjunction with those of Firbank petitioned Dr. Chadderton, Bishop of Chester—to which diocese they belonged,—for permission to have divine service in the chapel at Killington."

According to Nicolson and Burn's *History of Cumberland and Westmorland*, page 264, the reasons given by the petitioners were as follows:—"That because of the distance from their parish church at Kirkby Lonsdale (some of them being distant ten miles and none less than six), and by reason of inundations and of storms frequently raging in those parts in the winter season, they cannot carry their dead to be buried nor their children to be baptised without great peril both of soul and body, nor resort thither to hear divine service and receive the sacraments as becometh Christians and by right they are bounden."

The account continued, "He the said Bishop, in consideration of the premises, grants unto them his faculty and licence, that in the chapel situate within the territory, hamlet or lordship of Killington and Frithbank, commonly called Killington Chapel, by a minister or curate lawfully ordained or sufficiently approved from time to time, to be hired at the costs and charges of the said inhabitants, divine service shall be performed, the sacra-

ments and sacramental rites administered, matrimony solemnised, and the dead buried in the said chapel or chapel yard thereof, as freely and in as ample manner and form as then they were or lately had been obliged to perform the same at the said parish church."

In spite of the wording of the faculty granted, and in spite of the statement contained in Cox's *Churches of Westmorland*, page 157, that the chapel of Killington obtained baptismal rites in 1585, and the consequent suggestion that it would not have a font before that date, I suggest that it was provided with a font in the fourteenth century and that such font stayed there until 1711.

In that year great alterations took place in the old chapel, which, after the granting of the petition of 1585 had become known as "The Parish Church of All Saints Killington."

In the year 1936, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in England published their magnificently illustrated inventory of those to be found in Westmorland.

The expert of that Commission who inspected all the antiquities in the Kirkby Lonsdale district, including those in Killington, and whose knowledge on the subject is unrivalled, was Mr. G. C. Chambers, F.S.A.

He supplied all the information about them which is contained in that book, and in the part that deals with Killington he states that the church of All Saints was built in the fourteenth century, and that in it is still to be seen part of a fourteenth or fifteenth century shield containing the arms of the Pickerings.

He also says that in the year 1711, bells of that date were installed, that the west tower was probably built then, and that the font with an octagonal bowl and a sixteen sided stem of wood—which is now in the vestry—is probably of early eighteenth century workmanship.

I suggest that it was the stone font which was found at High Oaks, that was turned out of the church in the year

1711 to enable the early eighteenth century one to be set up in the baptistry in its place: and that this stone font probably lay in the churchyard or somewhere near the church until such time as someone realising its potential use as a water trough, and needing such an object, had it carted to the farmyard at High Oaks which was only about a couple of miles away.

When the photographs and details of the probable history of this font were sent to Mr. Chambers, he wrote saying that it would seem almost certainly to have come from Killington, and to have been replaced by the eighteenth century font, now in the vestry, and that from the photographs it appeared quite definitely to be of a date not prior to the latter end of the fourteenth century, and it might quite conceivably be of fairly late fifteenth century date.

When the font was inspected by Mr. W. T. McIntire, F.S.A., whose lectures on any antiquarian subjects give delight to all who hear them, he also considered that it was of fourteenth century period, and that it was most reasonable to suppose that it had originally belonged to Killington chapel, and this view is also held by others who are experts on such matters.

The dignified church of Kirkby Lonsdale with its splendid Norman and Early English features, has a font which was made for its baptistry in 1868. It is of somewhat elaborate workmanship and doubtless cost a good deal of money, but it looks as if it ought to be standing in some more modern church than ours.

As Killington already has one font in the baptistry and another in the vestry, its people can hardly want another; and what many lovers of Kirkby Lonsdale Church would like to see would be the removal of that mid-Victorian font and the setting up in its place of the one which is the subject of this paper, after it had been repaired by an expert and mounted on a suitable base. If this were

done, then the ancient and spacious baptistry with its fourteenth century font would look much more in keeping with its stately surroundings than it can be said to do at present, and it would also form a delightful and appropriate recognition of the facts that it was in the year 1538, four hundred years ago, that the first entry was made in the Kirkby Lonsdale church registers, and also that in the same year it was ordained that a Bible in English for the reading of the scriptures to the congregation should be provided and placed in every parish church.