

Derbyshire Fonts.

THE LATE-NORMAN FONT AT YOULGREAVE.

By G. LE BLANC SMITH.



IN the Church of All Saints, Youlgreave, which has been described as "a model of a restored church," there is a relic of ecclesiastical art which is absolutely unique. It is a font having very many curious and interesting features, as well as a curious and interesting history.

Its history is like that of many another such—one of gross neglect in former days, indeed one that is unhappily only too common. The neighbouring church of Elton formerly sheltered this fine old piece of work, but at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was decided to destroy and rebuild the fabric, so the font was evicted, and for many years lay, to the disgrace to its former custodians, in the churchyard, exposed to all the inclemency of the weather. However, in 1833, Mr. Pidcock, the then vicar of Youlgreave,* removed it for the purpose of ornamenting his vicarage garden, in which undignified position it remained until the advent of the next vicar, Mr. Wilmot, who in 1838 once more placed it under shelter in its present position, on the south side of the nave, at the west end of the south aisle.

The inhabitants of Elton, now recognizing their folly in letting such a treasure pass out of their hands, tried their utmost

* Youlgreave is the Mother Church to Elton.

to recover their original property, but in this they failed, and perhaps fortunately so for the font, for having most carefully restored it Youlgreave was in no mind to let it go again. The good people of Elton were finally appeased by the generosity of their lord of the manor, Mr. Thornhill, who had an exact "replica" made, with which they had to be satisfied. Such is the eventful history of this interesting work of art.



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Fig. 1.—Font at Youlgreave.

We may now consider its general features, date, and ornament, and the use of the curious appendage to this font. Its general features are a circular bowl with a peculiar hollowed projection on one side, a central column with four supporting side shafts, which are restorations,* and a modern base (fig. 1). Its date may be roughly placed as being prior to 1200, which means that it is Late-Norman. Its ornament must now be considered in

* They were unfortunately restored in a different coloured stone.

detail, presenting as it does many very unusual and quaint features. First and foremost is a spirited carving of a salamander, a genus of dragon-like lizard, a very occasional ornament upon fonts, which is here represented as crawling round one side of the font, the south, and its mouth supporting the curious little attached bowl, of which brief mention has already been made (figs. 2 and 3). A few examples of fonts bearing salamanders are given at the end of this



Fig. 2.—Salamander from the West side.

paper. The usual representation of this reptile is, as here, that of a lizard with bifurcated tail, nearly always with a single coil in it, a scaly body, wings, and a human cast of countenance wearing an expression of dissatisfaction, which is particularly to be observed on the font at Norton, Derbyshire. Two seems to be its full complement of legs, which are placed in the forward part of its body. Its neck is covered with scales, while its large eyes are placed well forward in its head

(fig. 3). Large teeth and a pair of ears are nearly always among its characteristic features. The feet in this instance are each furnished with three claws. It has always been considered an emblem of the sacrament of Baptism, perhaps as typifying Satan's discomfiture.

Turning our attention from the salamander, we naturally next notice the curious little bowl which it evidently is intended to support. I might here mention that the photograph, from which fig. 3 is taken, is by no means as satisfactory as one could wish, owing to the fact of the proximity of the little bowl to the south wall of the church. Dr. Cox, who, in his *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, devotes considerable attention to this font, gives three possible theories for its original purpose and use. They are—

(1) For the reception of the chrismatory or vessel containing the holy oil, or chrism, with which persons in former times were anointed after the rite of baptism.

(2) For affusion during the ceremony.

(3) For a holy water stoup, as the font itself would be conveniently placed near the entrance door.

In the above-mentioned work he proceeds to criticise these theories, holding (1) that the cruet of oil was a tall narrow vessel quite unsuited to stand in a hollow receptacle such as this at Youlgreave. He states (2) that in France, fonts often have stoups attached for affusion, but with a drain, while the Youlgreave example has none. This leaves the third theory, of a holy-water stoup, in sole possession of the field, which both by the late rector and by Dr. Cox was considered the most probable.

In *The Builder* of July, 1903, Dr. Cox gives a description of a Norman font at Odiham, Hants, in which he makes several useful suggestions as to the original use of such a projection. He says:—"There have been various surmises as to the original use or intention of this bracket. Of late years it has been generally maintained that it was to serve for baptism by affusion. The usual old rubrics of the baptismal

office of the Western Church ordained that when the infant was baptized by affusion, the surplus water was not to be allowed to return into the font or compartment of the font wherein was the consecrated water, but that a vessel was to be provided to receive the water running off the head of the recipient. This

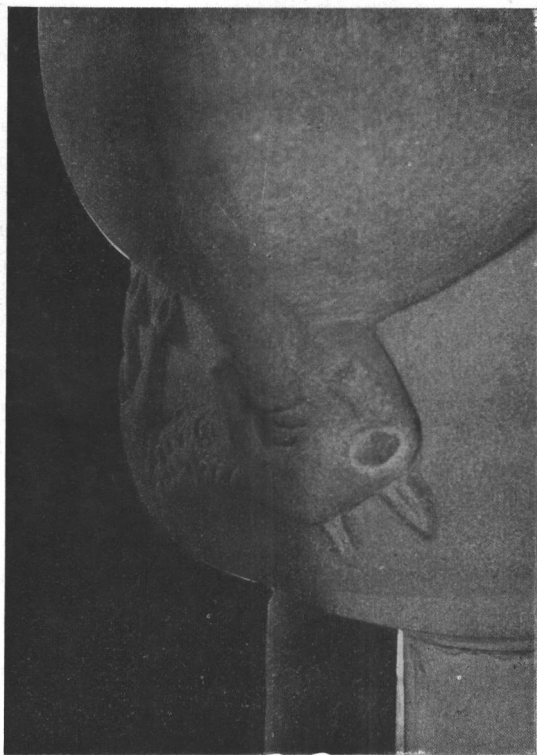


Fig. 3.—Salamander from the South side.

is the explanation of the bequests of silver basins for the fonts that are occasionally met with in English mediæval wills. The general modern Roman use is to have the font divided into two parts for this purpose, each with its own drain running into the earth. In cases where this is not provided, it is usual

for a server to hold a basin beneath the child's head. In several churches of Brittany and Normandy, as well as in the museums of Rouen and other towns in the north of France, are early fonts with side projections for this purpose. But in all these cases such projections have wide circular basins at the top and are continued down to the base of the font or floor level, being provided with a drain communicating with the soil or ground beneath. The curious circular projection or small stone basin protruding from the Norman font of Youlgreave, Derbyshire, has no drain, and doubtless served to hold a movable basin. The Odiham bracket could have had no connection with the chrysmatory for the holy oils used at baptism, for the mediæval chrysmatory was of very small dimensions, and held in the hand of a server." From this it will be seen that he has changed his views as to the original use of this attachment.

The remaining ornaments of the Youlgreave font consist of two fleurs-de-lys and a very peculiar design. Those three designs occupy what are now the east, north, and west sides of the font, the south side being that from which the salamander-supported bracket projects. The fleur on the west side can be seen in figs. 1 and 2, and to all appearances is intended to represent an ear of corn with leaves, the grains being very clearly delineated on the upper part. The fleur on the eastern side is a more elaborated example, as will be seen in fig. 4, the treatment being a regular feature of the Early English style, and the rounded ends and curved surface of the two principal leaves are very typical of that period. Here we have in direct contradistinction to the north face design, a figure which is intended to appear as though it actually grew from the font. These two fleurs are well cut and finished in a bold fashion, the whole being nicely rounded off; but the figure on the north, which we shall next notice, is but poorly cut in comparison, and has a flattened surface. This difference may be clearly seen by comparing figs. 4 and 5.

The peculiar example of foliage on the north side (fig. 5), to which reference has just been made, should be compared with that on the Late-Norman font at Sapcote, Leicestershire, and on that of the Early English period at Weston, Lincolnshire. The design at Youldgreave seems to consist of a figure somewhat

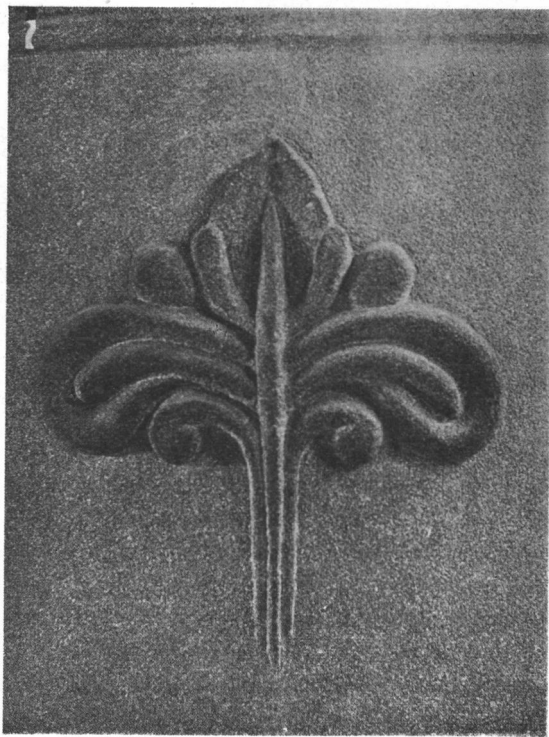


Fig. 4.—Fleur-de-lys on the East side.

like an old-fashioned door or drop handle,* through which pass two stems, the upper ends being slightly the larger and curved outwards, giving the appearance of two modern hockey-clubs back to back. From these stems, and below the door-handle piece,

* Compare the handle on the old door of Denby Hall, illustrated on page 7 of this Vol.—Ed.

are two leaves, one on each stem, growing from their outer and opposite sides, with but one edge, the lower, serrated, while the upper is quite plain and smooth; above and adjoining these are the ends of other leaves, two on each side, the upper portions of which are between the stems and door-handle-shaped piece. The two stems, which support the leaves, grow through the loop or handle passing over its base and under the upper portion. This loop is so carved on the font as to give the appearance at its upper termination of an actual growth from the body or bowl of the font. Not so the lower ends of the stems, which have the appearance of hanging down on the exterior or face of the bowl. In other instances this peculiar combination of designs appears differently arranged, the foliage being simpler and the loop lower on the stems.

The only other point to notice in the scheme of ornament is the double ring of round moulding, encircling both bowl and stoup* (see Fig. 1). A mistaken idea seems to exist that all salamander-ornamented fonts *must* be Norman. This is amply and effectually disproved by the example at Norton, in Derbyshire, where we have a bowl with clustered shafts, between which is inserted that ornament of Late-Norman and Early English times, the dog-tooth. This font is illustrated in Dr. Cox's great work and in Paley's *Baptismal Fonts*. There is at Ashford-in-the-Water, near Bakewell, a font of the Perpendicular period, which has a doubtful salamander upon it. It is between the bowl and shaft, with its head projecting on one side and its tail hanging down on the other.

The font at Youlgreave, strangely enough, is mentioned by neither Paley nor Simpson, except in a passing remark by the former in reference to the projection, in which he falls into the inexcusable error of comparing it with the Decorated example of Pitsford, Northants.† This Northamptonshire font

* The total absence of the usual Norman ornaments, such as the chevron, star, or cable, is to be noticed, showing the advanced period of the Norman style in which this font was constructed.

† This is an error into which nearly everyone falls in describing either of the two fonts.

has but a plain *solid* ledge, three-sided, flat, and pierced with holes apparently for the reception of a reading-desk, book rest, or image. The stoup at Youlgreave, as has already been pointed out, is horseshoe-shaped, hollow, and drainless, besides which, it is not lined with lead as is the interior of the font. The font is engraved in Markland's *Remarks on English*

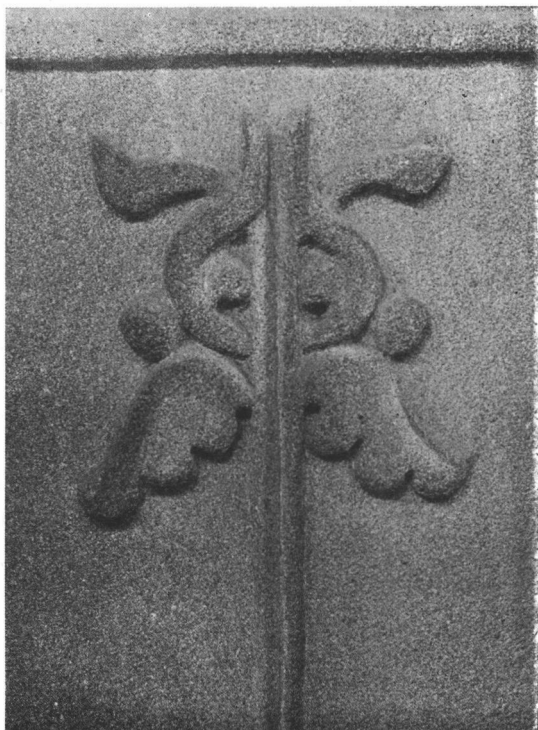


Fig. 5.—Ornament on North side.

Churches, p. 92; Viollet-le-duc's *Glossary*; Corblet's *Manual D' Archéologie*; Bateman's *Antiquities of Derbyshire*, p. 241; and in Dr. Cox's well-known *Churches of Derbyshire*, Vol. II., p. 234.

The original font of Youlgreave church, which was supplanted by this alien, was described by a visitor in 1827 as

being "plain and circular." When it was subsequently ousted to make room for its more interesting and more ambitious rival, the subject of this article, it was hidden from the public view behind the William IV. Inn in the village. From this vicissitude it was most happily removed by the Incumbent of Warslow, Staffordshire, a son of Mr. Pidcock, the Vicar of Youlgreave, who, similarly, had obtained the present example from Elton, although, in his case, it may be, only for the purpose of ornamenting his garden.

If we turn to the churchwardens' accounts, which, by the way, are as interesting as any I know, under the year 1752 we find the following entry:—

{ In ale to the people who assisted in unloading	
{ the Faunt and setting it up	3 0

What font can this have been? From the meagre account given by the visitor of 1827, whom I have already mentioned, it seems as though the font of his time were Norman. The fine example I have endeavoured to describe, certainly did not find shelter in this church until 1838, as we have already seen.

Either the font of 1752 was of a "churchwarden" type of art, which might also come within the description given by the visitor, or, counting the font originally in the church, there have been four fonts, namely, (1) the font prior to 1752; (2) the font which required 3s. worth of ale for its "setting up" in 1752; (3) the "plain and circular" font (perhaps Norman) of the 1827 visitor; (4) the fine specimen which forms the subject of this paper. On the whole, I am inclined to believe in the later date (churchwarden) for the 1827 font.

Mention has been made of the font at Pitsford, which is furnished with a projection, and, as there are others having these strange protrusions, it will be useful to enumerate them. There may, perhaps, be one or two others, of which I have no knowledge, for Paley, in his *Baptismal Fonts*, gives an engraving on the title-page of a font with a book-rest on one side. He, however, says nothing by which it can be identified.

Place.	County.	Date.	Use of Projection.	References.
Youlgreave ...	Derby	... Late Norman.	{ Stoup, or to hold movable basin for affusion. ...	As above.
Pitsford	... Northants.	Decorated ...	{ Book rest, or holder for same.	Paley.
Odiham	... Hants.	... Norman	{ Support for hinge to a heavy cover. ...	<i>Builder</i> , July, '03.
Pengwern	... Denbigh	... (doubtful) ...	(See below).	<i>Arch. Jnl.</i> , Vol. 13, p. 292.

The last-mentioned example perhaps merits a short description. It was discovered in a bog near Dinas Mawddwy, Merionethshire.* It is made of oak, and is of a rude form. In it are two hollows, the larger measuring 11 ins. wide by $3\frac{1}{2}$ ins. deep, while the smaller is but 3 ins. wide and only 1 in. in depth. It is but a small specimen altogether. On each side of the smaller hollow is a piece of simple foliage, while at the opposite side of the larger hollow to that on which the small one is situated, is the word ATHRYWYN. The writer in the *Archæological Journal* continues: "The large cavity contained the water, the lesser may have held the salt, which to this day is used in the Roman Catholic Church in the ceremony of baptism. The priest blesses the salt, in case it has not been blessed before, then takes a little, and putting it into the child's mouth, says, 'Receive the salt of wisdom.'" The writer refers to the Youlgreave example, and gives the three theories which I have quoted from Dr. Cox's work, without committing himself to any. It must not for one moment be supposed that the stoup at Youlgreave was ever used as a receptacle for salt, as its size alone should be a sufficient answer to any such suggestion.

The following are detailed measurements of the font and its ornaments:—

* It is now, I believe, at Lord Mostyn's seat, Pengwern Hall.

LATE NORMAN FONT AT YOULGREAVE, DERBYSHIRE.

Date, *Circa* 1150-1200.

Total Height.....	39 in.	Height of Stoup.....	11 in.
Height of Bowl	20 in.	Width of „	12½ in.
Width of „	28 in.	Int. width of „	9½ in.
Depth of „	13 in.	Int. depth of „	6½ in.
Thickness of Bowl	3 in.	Thickness of „ ..	} 1½ in.
Width of interior.....	22 in.	round the top ...	

Salamander supporting the Stoup Height (greatest) 8 in.

Width „ 24 in.

Fleur-de-Lys on East Face Height..... 12 in.

Width 10½ in.

Fleur-de-Lys on West Face Height..... 11 in.

Width 9½ in.

Ornament on North Face Height..... 13 in.

Width 8 in.

Material: Rough red porous sandstone, lead lined, with drain.

Other examples of fonts having the Salamander carved upon them :—

1. Salehurst.....Sussex.....Transitional Norman.
2. NortonDerbyshire.....Early English.
3. HaddenhamBucks.Norman.
4. Bridekirk.....Cumberland
5. Dearham „
6. Winchester Cathedral ...Hants.
7. SculthorpeNorfolk
8. St. AustellCornwallTrans-Norman.

The figures on the fonts at Ashford-in-the-Water, and Alington, S. Devon, are of too doubtful a character to be here included.