

## Pleasley Church.

BY WILLIAM STEVENSON.

### THE THREE OLD FONTS.

HAVING had some experience in solving the riddles of old fonts and their remains, I undertook as a labour of love, to investigate the one only or generally known example standing at the west-end of the old aisleless church of Pleasley—a God's-house on a foot-hill in the vale of Meden, situated at the head of the rock-lined Forge valley, whose name rings up some forgotten hammersmiths located there for waterpower, and the yield of fuel supplied by the charcoal-burners who plied their *coal*-trade in Sherwood forest on the old time oaks.

The first published notice of a font in this church, and as far as my knowledge extends the only one, is from the pen of Dr. J. Charles Cox, as follows :—(speaking) “ of the tower, and here is placed the font. It appears to be of modern construction, except, perhaps, the wide circular base.”—*Churches of Derbyshire*, vol. i., p. 314, 1915.

It is a matter of regret that examiners of the interior of this church during daylight should find themselves in darkness, the windows are small, and the glass is painted : this involved a second visit, one equipped with means—on the old line of match and candle—by which the font yielded the inscribed date on its east-face of “ 1662,” and silently the story that its predecessor was destroyed during the Civil war (1642-1649), that the church was fontless during the Commonwealth, or Interregnum (1649-1660), an omission the parishioners set about remedying

when the king came to his own again at the latter date ; and still further that the circular base was undoubtedly a prime member of the original or mediaeval font utilized in a mean or humble place, and its ornament lost or hidden except to modern or twentieth-century explorers. The 17th century or upper portion of this font is 27 inches high, octogonal on plan, and  $25\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter over all. The basin is circular, 16 inches diameter,  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches deep, and half-circular in its section. Diagram No. 1, is a

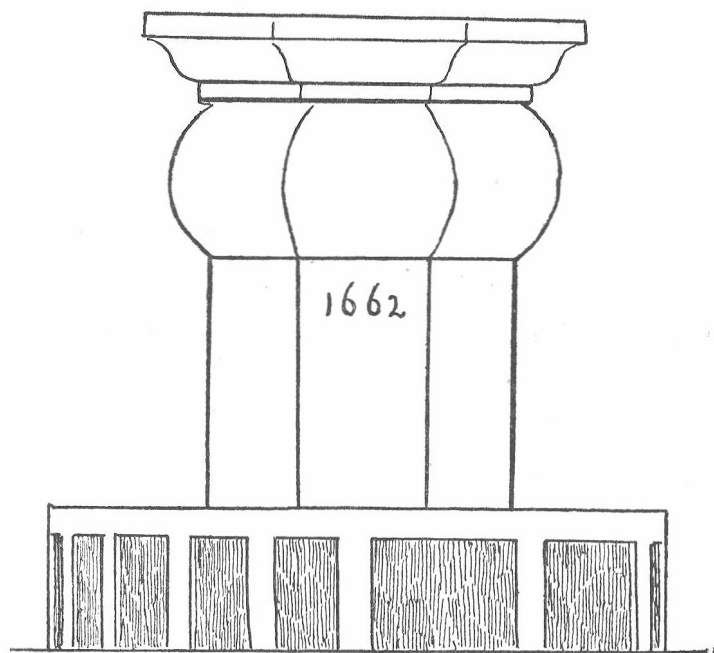


DIAGRAM NO. 1.

measured elevation in line of the same, it is innocent of any association with a contemporary cover.

The 12th century (if not late 11th century?) base is 35 inches in diameter, and exposed 9 inches above the present level of the tower-floor, which is three steps above

that of the nave-floor. This suggests the tower was a later addition to the church, and as the ground rose westwards its floor could not be wrought level without quarrying in the hard limestone-rock.

No. 2 diagram is a reversal in position of this circular-base, as far upward as evidence now extends ; above, in dotted-lines, is a restoration of the lost part on paper, which may or may not be correct, but, that the base, so restored, was a part of the older font, available for conversion to this purpose by the Carolean masons, especially in being already bored for the drain, admits of no doubt.

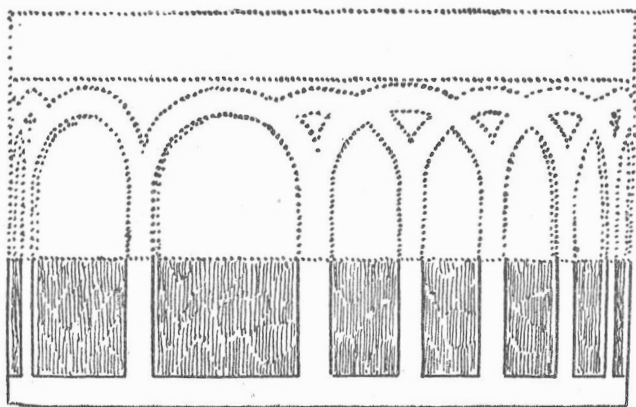


DIAGRAM NO. 2.

Viewed in its present position it is "mason-dressed," or "tooled" on its edge, but on the top (the original unseen bottom), it is "quarry-faced"—that is "axe-dressed" by the "scapplers" (*not a dictionary word*)—who still remain hereabout and shape the raw material into commercial blocks. The stone is the "dolomite" of the geologist, the "yellow-magnesian-limestone" of the local rocks, identical with that quarried at Mansfield-Woodhouse, it differs somewhat in tint, calcareous quality, and hardness with Mansfield stone, which is known as "white," and or "red."

The vertical lines or parts, on the edge of this "circular base," are clearly defined in a few instances, and may possibly extend somewhat below the floor-line, but the majority are short, and consequently broken away with what was their upper parts, i.e. with the destruction of the basin proper. They are  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches broad, with panels 4 inches broad-sunken  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch, and there is evidence of white paint or hard-set limewash in protected places. That they were parts of an arcade design of *interlaced*-arches may be assumed, but this is proved by two panels (if not three, as the design is there damaged), each being the exact width of *two narrow panels and one pillar*, i.e.  $9\frac{3}{4}$  inches. This feature of semi-circular arches in conjunction with interlaced arches, which latter suggest the evolution of the narrow gothic or lancet ones, is seen as an arcade ornament on one of the Norman west towers of Southwell cathedral.

This *interlaced*-archwork is the ornament on the font of Kirkbourne church, near Driffield, Yorkshire, where it has a band above it of Anglo-Saxon plaited strap-work, a style of ornament that survived in some parts into early Norman times. It will here be seen that the arcading is only outlined, bases and caps are absent, the actual interlacing of the arches is not shown, nor are the shafts rounded—as complete examples of this class of work are—instance the grand font in Screveton Church, Notts., illustrated in Dr. Cox's little, handy book—*County Churches, Notts.*, p. 177—a highly finished font-example that lands us on the threshold of the Early-English period or style of architecture that commenced, as is popularly considered, with the accession of Richard I. in 1189. We are here travelling somewhat off the line, and in regaining it may with advantage turn to an undoubted early example of such arcade ornament in Warsop church, Notts., a so-to-speak next door neighbour of Pleasley church—5 miles distant N.E. it, alike, is put to a second meaner

use, and again occurs inverted in position. It has been noted but never illustrated, hence it is given here as diagram 3, or as an example of an unquestionably early arcade-ornament whose pillars are massive, void of bases and capitals with the horizontal lines of the latter serving to express the strange feature of transoms, as if remembering an architecture in wood.

This interesting stone is built in the west face of the tower—itself a very early Norman construction—in a refacing or rebuilding of the S.W. corner; its situation is about 5 feet above the ground, at one end it seems to be treated as a roll-mould or shaft, but if so the quirk is

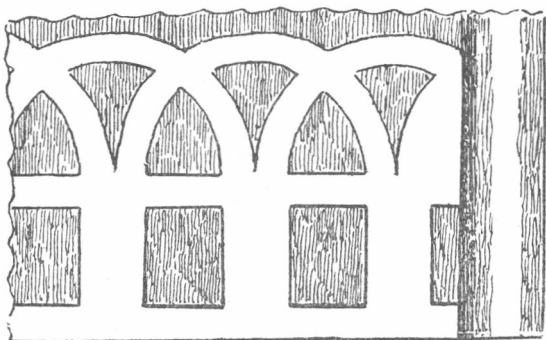


DIAGRAM 3.

filled with mortar and “tucked” up as a joint. The arches design shows it to have terminated there, which suggests we have here the corner of an early font—which might be proved if the stone was taken out and examined.

There is something yet to be said of the large arches, in one particular point on the periphery of this “wide circular base,” do they denote the side opposite the priest when performing the office of baptism after the manner of the cross on the side of a chalice, as obtained in pre-reformation times?



A BROKEN DISUSED FONT IN THE VESTRY OF  
PLEASLEY PARISH CHURCH.

Consulting the rector (until the autumn of 1918) the Rev. C. A. Hedley Going, M.A., touching this font base, of which he said nothing was known, he stated he had another font locked up in the vestry, one, of which he had taken a photograph—here reproduced.

Nothing is known of its history further than the rector made its acquaintance in his garden, then serving the office of a flower-vase; how long it had been there he knew not. It now stands on the floor in the S.E. corner of the vestry, nearly hidden by fittings or furniture, it is octagonal on plan, and has provision for a two-ply wooden lid or cover; the upper face or rim is in part broken away and two of the eight faces have been operated upon by a sculptor with a presumably late eleventh, or early twelfth century hand, one face only has been completed, the other not wrought upon below the arch or canopy. This latter, with its enrichment of pearls or beads enlarged at the apex, is identical with one or two arches on the face of the fragment of a stone cross treasured in Shelford church, Notts, that encloses a rude representation of a "countless Madonna." The one preserved edge of this square shaft is a tall arched panel filled with close plaited strap-work. The whole fragment was an object of intense interest to the late Mr. Romilly Allen, who ruled it rich in Scandinavian or Viking feeling, or influence and possible date.

The other canopy is clearly the Norman "billet-mould"—the principal decorative ornament on the chancel arch of this Pleasley church.

This font may not date earlier than *c.* 1100, but the pearl or bead-lined canopy moulding would not be out of place on an object one or more centuries earlier, as it is traceable to Roman influence, and ivory carvings of the early christian era.

The figure is seated on a bench or throne, and clad in a chasuble with enriched border or orphery; a book

stamped with a cross, is in the left hand: it strongly resembles one wrought on the Norman south doorway of the adjoining parish church of Teversal—2½ miles distant S.W., illustrated in *Old Churches of the Mansfield Deanery*, 1907, p. 27. The latter has the right hand raised in the act of benediction, whereas, on this font, the engagement of that member is not easily readable, nor what the object is which he holds, nor has it, as a question—although submitted to half-a-dozen learned gentlemen in this country—been finally settled.

Perhaps some of our members may be able to make suggestions in our next issue.

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