



Leaden Font,
Walton-on-the-hill,

J Lewis Andre del

LEADEN FONT

AT THE

CHURCH OF ST. MARY, WALTON-ON-THE-HILL,
SURREY.

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ALTHOUGH at the present time lead is no longer used in an ornamental manner, the case was different in the Middle Ages, when it was made to receive the impress of the hand of the art-workman in common with other materials which appear to be more fitted for the purpose, and many varied objects composed of this metal were so treated. Outside buildings, the gutters were sometimes formed of leaden troughs stamped with a flower pattern—as at Lincoln Cathedral—and the ridges of the roofs were crested with a running fleur-de-lis design in lead—as at Exeter. Abroad, there exist also finials, vanes, and crocketing similarly composed, and fixed to iron cores or framing; even statues were constructed of plates of this metal soldered over wooden images, and afterwards placed outside edifices where stone would soon perish. Leaden coffins, now so hideous, were in mediæval times often richly ornamented; those in the Temple Church, London, of the twelfth century, were fine specimens of art, and of a simpler character. The cists which were discovered at Lewes, and contained the bones of William de Warrenne and Gundrada, the daughter of the Conqueror, these were decorated by a diamond-shaped design, formed by the impressions of ropes on the sand mould used for the casting.

In English domestic work, lead continued to be employed ornamentally down to a very recent date. When rain-water pipes were introduced, their heads were often embellished with coats of arms, or bore the initials of the owner or a date.

Cisterns were also objects of much decorative art, an excellent example of which remains in use at "The Cedars," Broad Green, Croydon; it has three panels in front and one at each end, the centre division has the date (1768), the others contain vases of flowers; a rich foliaged cornice completing the design. Lead quarries were cast in ornamental figures and used for ventilating pantries and larders; a combination of four or five of these pierced diamond-shaped lights often produced a very pleasing appearance.

Fonts of lead are met with both on the Continent and in our own country; the number in England is probably about thirty. Early in the present century, it was stated in *The Antiquarian Itinerary*, Vol. VI, that only five were known; a list in the sixth volume of *The Archaeological Journal* gives twenty-two as the total number, whilst a catalogue, compiled by Mr. Peacocke, in "Notes and Queries," enumerates twenty-four, but even this may be enlarged, another example not mentioned by him having been found by the writer of this paper, at Eyethorne, in Kent. In Surrey there is only one specimen, that at St. Mary, Walton-on-the-Hill; the font at Chobham, often stated to be a leaden one, being merely the lining of a wooden bowl. In the adjacent counties, there are in Berks and Sussex three in each, and Kent has two, but whilst Surrey can boast of only a single example it has reason to be proud of its possession, as it is fully equal to any in point of artistic merit and delicacy of detail.

The majority of our leaden fonts appear to have been executed at the Norman period of art, at the time when the style was changing to the Early Pointed, and of this date is that at Walton. Only one of second period or Decorated character has come to the Writer's notice, that at Parham, in Sussex, and it is probably unique. It is

curious to observe that, out of the small number scattered over the country, two are of seventeenth century date, one being a palpable imitation of Romanesque work, and probably a reproduction of one destroyed at the Commonwealth.

The design of the font at St. Mary's, Walton-on-the-Hill, presents a series of nine round-headed arches, enclosing as many seated figures (probably intended to represent apostles), and having foliated bands above and below the arcading. The effigies are of three patterns equally repeated, each statuette being seated on a panel-fronted bench or throne and with a sphere beneath the feet; the right hands of some are upheld in the attitude of benediction, with the rest they are simply placed in the lap; a book is held in the left hands of some, those of the others take hold of their mantles. The contour and pose of these figures is amazingly like that shown by throned persons in Anglo-Saxon and Norman MSS.—the knees wide apart, the feet close together; the drapery is also very similar to early illuminations in the disposition of the folds and general outlines. The costume consists of a long, close-fitting tunic reaching to the feet, and with a plain collar; over the right shoulder is thrown a mantle, variously disposed round the body; the heads project boldly beyond the rest of the surface of the font, and are each bearded and nimbed; there is much grace and dignity in the treatment of these little effigies, which are only eight inches high. The arcade has twisted shafts with beaded bands, the caps of a common Norman and Early Pointed form with volutes, the mouldings of the arches being composed of three rolls, whilst the spandrils between them are filled with exquisite conventional foliage of different designs. Below the arcade is a band of running strap and floriated work, the former being beaded along the centre; two different patterns compose this ornamentation which is alternated at each panel. Running round the upper edge of the bowl is a pretty discontinuous waved band of a foliated pattern between two beaded strings. The junction of the lead, when

the font bowl was made up into a circular form from the flat one in which it was cast, caused a clumsy "botch" or fault in one of the arches which is very imperfect, and at this point is a projection to which the staple for the cover was probably fixed, a similar one being opposite, where also the arcade is mutilated.

The dimensions are as follows:—

Outside diameter	20 inches.
Inside ditto	19 $\frac{1}{4}$ „
Depth inside bowl	13 $\frac{3}{4}$ „

The measurements of the Sussex examples of corresponding date, at Edburton and Piccombe, are slightly larger. These late Norman Sussex fonts are somewhat similar to the Surrey one in having narrow horizontal bands of foliage running round them, and they have the same projecting brackets for the cover fastenings, but the Walton specimen is much superior to them, both in conception and in the delicacy of the ornamentation, though this beautiful piece of true art-workmanship has been much neglected and barbarously covered with a coat of black oil paint, so that it is only after a careful examination that many of the above details can be made out with certainty. Its present position in the church is, moreover, not worthy of an object of so much interest, it being close to the south wall and hemmed in with seating; a very poor cover surmounts it, but the modern stone stem on which it is fixed is in better taste. The edifice in which this font is placed is mostly modern, but retains a lofty-shafted 3rd Pointed chancel arch, triple non-graded sedilia, and what seems to have been a lychnoscope on the north side of the choir. An external recess to the east of this opening has a modern inscription, stating John de Waltone to be the founder, and with the date (of his death?) 1268. Probably he was a rebuilder, as the parish is mentioned in Domesday Book, and the font is considerably older than the latter half of the 13th century; a local tradition will have it, that it was brought from a neighbouring private chapel at the time of the Reformation.