

The Armorial Fonts of the Oxford Diocese.

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THE panelled faces of the polygonal fonts of the later Middle Ages would seem to offer a peculiarly appropriate field for heraldic decoration. Yet, in fact, armorial fonts are few and far between. Dr. Cox lists only fifty-eight in *English Church Furniture*; among the three hundred illustrations in Bond's *Fonds and Font Covers* only three show a shield of arms; so that while Berkshire, with but a single example, is below the average of the English counties Oxford and Bucks with four and six raise the total well above the diocesan average. The rarity of heraldry on fonts was noted by Paley who supposed that the Middle Age, like his own, considered it unsuitable for sacred purposes. This is to mistake the medieval view which; as gargoyles, corbels and misericords show, drew no fine distinctions between sacred and secular subjects; it is also to overlook the vast destruction that has been going on with progressive ruthlessness since the Reformation. Originally every window had its shield, as we may infer from what remains at Dorchester; every wall was painted with them, as we may still see at Hailes and Northmoor; even the priestly vestments and altar frontals were embroidered with the arms of their donors, and glowed the more resplendently for the fact. "And I will," ordered Henry VII, "that the walles, doores, windows, Archies and vaults and ymagies of the same our Chapell, within and without, be painted, garnished, and adorned with our armes, bagies, cognoisaunts, and other convenient painteng, in as goodly and riche maner as suche a werk requireth, and as to a Kings werk apperteigneth." And Robert Vertue, the architect in whom Gothic genius culminated, saw that it was so.

The unsculptured shields, now blank on many fonts, were undoubtedly once emblazoned with coats; and it is probable that the panels on others were filled with painted shields of which no trace remains. Lee records such on the font at Rycote in 1574.

One excuse for the publication of this essay is the fact that within living memory two of the small number of heraldic fonts still surviving in the diocese have been thrown out of the churches to moulder in the graveyard, where one of them even now remains; a further justification is the inadequacy and inaccuracy of the accounts given of these historic monuments in the standard works on local antiquities.

BERKSHIRE.

EAST HAGBOURNE.

East Hagbourne has the only armorial font in the county. There is a photograph of it in the *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal* Vol. 18, Fig. 51. The *V.C.H.*, III, 482, says that it "dates from the 15th century, and is very probably contemporary with the south aisle, at the west end of which it is placed. The bowl, stem and base are octagonal. The sides of the bowl have quatrefoiled panels containing alternately shields and foliated bosses." The coats painted on the shields, ignored by the *V.C.H.*, though clearly traceable, even in Mr. Keyser's photographs, and recorded by him, make the probability certain, for they are those of Clarice Drokensford and her husbands, one of whom, as his brass attests, was "fundator istius Ile."¹

The four shields bear

- (1) S.E. Quarterly gold and azure four shepherd's ("doge's") caps countercoloured, Drokensford.
- (2) S.W. Gules a saltire silver, Windsor.
- (3) N.W. Gold on a fesse sable a crescent silver, York.
- (4) N.E. Silver a cross gules, St. George.

Clarice Drokensford, "domina de Westhakborn" as her brass describes her, belonged to the family of John Drokensford, Bishop of Bath and Wells 1309-26,² and first married, as his third wife, Richard Windsor of West Hagbourne, *ob.* 1367, a descendant of Walter Fitz Other, D.B. lord of that place, the Conqueror's Constable of Windsor, from which his family derived their name.³ She married lastly John York who survived her by ten years, dying in 1413. Three of the shields are thus accounted for.

The *V.C.H.*, III, 478, says that Clarice also married, as her second husband, Helming Leget, keeper of the Windsor estates during the minority of the heir. Burke's *General Armory* ascribes to a family of his name a shield with a red cross stepped on a silver field; and it is tempting to imagine that the fourth shield on the font may be a version of this coat. But the arms on his seal, of which there is an impression on a document, dated 1401, in the British Museum,⁴ show a saltire engrailed with a false roundel for a difference. Moreover, the records of his official life, of which there are scores in the Patent Rolls alone,⁵ prove that he long outlived Clarice Drokensford and that his wives were Margery and

¹ *Berks, Bucks and Oxon Arch. Jour.* XVIII (1913), 103, and Fig. 53.

² Bedford, *Blazon of Episcopacy* (1897), 22.

³ Collins, *Peerage* art. Plymouth; *Ancestor*, I (1902), 121.

⁴ Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the British Museum*, III, 185.

⁵ These show that he held offices in the royal household in the last years of Edward III, was Constable of Windsor 1369-77, Justice of the Peace for Essex 1380 and Sheriff 1403, keeper of the seal for recognisance of debts, clerk of the royal navy 2 Henry IV, coroner and King's escheator, and that he had license to make a park at Hadleigh 43 Ed. III and to crenellate his house there 45 Ed. III. See also *Harl. Soc.*, XIV, 591.

Alice ; the first was alive in 1386 and the second in 1401 when she and her husband had a grant for life of a tun of wine yearly ; her I.P.M. is dated 7 Hy. V. It is therefore certain that although Leget, as an official of the Royal Exchequer, had charge of the heir of Richard Windsor, he did not marry his widow. His son and heir was John Leget but it is, of course, possible that he had a younger son of his own name whom he married to Clarice Windsor as her second husband.

The red cross on the font, however, must represent St. George, an appropriate patron saint for a family taking their name from Windsor and descended from its first constable.

The shepherd's caps, *pilia pastoralia*, would appear to have been substituted for roses by the Bishop in token of his pastoral office, and afterwards adopted by his family. The field of the Windsor arms is usually powdered with golden crosslets as in the 16th century glass in their mortuary chapel at Bradenham but there was here no trace of them. The York fesse often bore a besant on either side of the crescent but these charges are absent alike on the font and in the shield on the southern label-stop of the west window which indicates that John York and Clarice also rebuilt the tower. The shield on the northern stop, described as "indecipherable" by the *V.C.H.*, is clearly that of Drokensford ; its unusual charges were mis-read as "birds' heads" by Mr. C. E. Keyser and as "swans' heads couped and addorsed" by Dr. Percy Dearmer in his account of the bishop's tomb at Wells.¹ This coat, having been identified by Mr. P. S. Spokes,² at once gave the clue to the others ; and in the summer of 1939 all were repainted by Mr. George Nutt by subscription of three local antiquaries. At the same time the shields of Drokensford, Windsor and York were inserted in the memorial window to the late Sir Francis folkes placed by his sister, the Viscountess Dillon, at the east end of the aisle.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

BOW BRICKHILL.

The western face of the octagonal 15th century font has a quatrefoiled panel containing a shield bearing two hammers ; the north-eastern face has a trefoiled panel with a rose. The Historical Monuments Commission calls the first "a shield with arms, two tau crosses or mallets," and ignores the rose. The *V.C.H.*, IV, 292, calls the charges on the shield "implements, perhaps instruments of the Passion" ; as the handles are rounded they are certainly not tau crosses. They are very like the two hammers on one of the Passion shields on the Covenham font illustrated in

¹ Dearmer, *Wells*, 127.

² *Berks Arch. Jour.* XXXIX (1935), 157.

THE ARMORIAL FONTS OF THE OXFORD DIOCESE.



PLATE I.

Photo : P. S. Spokes.

Broughton, Bucks.

Font in churchyard. South face, 1941.

THE ARMORIAL FONTS OF THE OXFORD DIOCESE.



PLATE II.—A. *Photo : P. S. Spokes.*

Broughton, Bucks. Base of font in churchyard. East face, 1941.
(Measure = 6 inches).



PLATE II.—B. *Photo : P. S. Spokes.*

Broughton, Bucks. Base of font in churchyard. North face, 1941.
(Measure = 6 inches).

Paley's *Baptismal Fonts*, but that is one of a series bearing all the symbols of the Passion. It seems hardly likely that a single Passion shield would be used or that, if it were, hammers would be selected for its charge, instead of the cross or the crown of thorns. Hammers were the symbols of SS. Adrian, Eloy and William of Norwich, mallets of St. Denis; but Bow Brickhill Church is dedicated to All Saints. In 1216 Geoffrey Chauncey's land of Brickhill was assigned as dower to his daughter Margaret wife of Geoffrey Martell; the arms of Martell were three hammers, but though there is room in the base of the shield for a third hammer there is no vestige of one, and it is unlikely that a 13th century lord would be commemorated on a 15th century font.

BROUGHTON.

Just inside the churchyard gate is a small eighteenth century font whose scalloped bowl has been filled with cement in which a brass sundial has been set. (*Plate No. 1*). The Monuments Commission describe the dial, which is dated 1657, but not the font, since their terms of reference extend only to 1700; the *V.C.H.* mentions neither. When Lipscomb wrote, in 1843, this font was still in the church, "a modern circular basin of stone on a round pedestal." He adds that it stood upon "the old octagonal font, inverted, having coats of arms remaining thereon."¹ It still stands upon an octagonal plinth, each side of which is engraved with a shield of arms, no longer inverted; but this base, being only roin. in height, seems much too small to have served as a font. The spreading foot of the pedestal makes it impossible to ascertain if there is a basin beneath it; if so it must be an unusually shallow one. The arms, however, which, so far as they are decipherable, are those of the fifteenth century lords of the fee, suggest that it is some centuries older than the font which now stands upon it, for they do not include the coats of any lords of the place after the failure of the male line of the de Broughtons in 1529. They are

- (1) Cheveronry, imperfectly legible, St. Maur? (two cheverons) or Clare? (three cheverons). (*Plate No. I.*)
- (2) Two bars and in chief three (? roses).
- (3) Three crosses, two incised, one in relief, and a chief with a pale thereon, doubtfully heraldic. (*Plate No. II.a.*)
- (4) Three bars paty in chief two roundels, doubtfully heraldic. (*Plate No. II.b.*)
- (5) A fesse between three molets pierced (*Plate No. II.b.*)
- (6) A cheveron, Stafford. (*Plate No. II.b.*)
- (7) A cross paty, Latimer.
- (8) A plain cross, Aylesbury. (*Plate No. I.*)

These appear to be actual coats, cut by a skilled mason without heraldic knowledge, from rough sketches.

¹ Lipscomb's *Bucks.* IV, 81.

The manorial history given by Lipscomb, *Bucks*, IV, 78, and the *V.C.H.*, IV, 304, shows that the Giffard lordship here descended through the Clares to the Staffords;¹ that the Countess Judith's lands, of the Honour of Huntingdon, passed through Hastings to Latimer; that the family taking their name from the place became mesne lords of both manors and sold one of them to Philip Aylesbury in 1334 while the other in 1409 was in moities between St. Maur and Latimer, Richard, Lord St. Maur, *ob.* 1409, holding in right of his wife Mary, widow of John Broughton. This moiety, reverting to the Broughtons, passed with their coheir Katherine, in 1530, to William Howard and, with his daughter Agnes, to William Paulet who sold it to Thomas Duncombe in 1572. He bought the Aylesbury manor in the following year and his descendants held both until 1748 when they were sold to Barnabas Backwell. Half the coats on the font are thus recognisable as those of the medieval manorial lords; and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the others, likewise, are attempts, however unheraldic, to represent the shields of other persons connected with the history of the manor.

The most clearly cut shield is that bearing a fesse and molets (*Plate* No. II.b); the *V.C.H.* in discussing Drayton Parslow, III, 345, ascribes this coat to the Passelewes and shows that William Passelewe of Wavendon married Joan, widow of Ralf Broughton, *ob.* 1316. But although these are the arms attributed to Paslew in Burke's *General Armory* they are quite unlike those elsewhere recorded for Passelewe of Bucks. One of the shields must represent Broughton but, unfortunately, it has not been possible to discover the arms borne by that family.

The weather-worn condition of this stone, moss-grown and grass-covered, is a reproach to those responsible for the safe-keeping of church property. Its crumbling state, however, has made it possible to submit a fragment of the stone to the expert examination of Mr. C. J. Bayzand of the Department of Geology in the University of Oxford who reports that it is "a local piece of Forest Marble, no doubt quarried in the immediate neighbourhood." The font now standing on it is of harder, York stone.

DRAYTON PARSLow.

The font is illustrated in the Report of the Historical Monuments Commission, p. 45, where it is described as "late 15th century"; the *V.C.H.*, III, 347, calls it "15th century." The shape of the shields upon it suggests the earlier date. They are carved upon the six angles of the hexagonal bowl. Three of them bear a *cheveron between three lion's heads rased*, two bear *three bends* and in the quarter a *lion passant*, and the sixth *three bends sinister* and in chief a *lion passant to the sinister*.

¹ Dugdale, *Baronage*, I, 160.

The charges are boldly but crudely cut by an unheraldic sculptor, so that the surveyors of the Monuments Commission failed to identify the beast's heads but suggest that they may be ram's. The *V.C.H.* calls them lions' heads. Lipscomb does not mention the font but records, "in a north window these arms: *azure a cheveron or between three lions' heads*; over this coat is written Dudley."¹ A family of that name, bearing these arms, and claiming to be an off-shoot of the Sutton lords of Dudley, held Clapton, Northants and obtained a baronetcy in 1660 but their connexion with Drayton has not been elucidated.²

Bendy gold and azure a quarter silver with a lion passant were the arms of Sir John Passelewe who held Drayton in 1275,³ and *three bends and a canton with a lion passant* those of Richard Passelew on his 15th century seal in the British Museum collection. The family held the manor to which their name was added, from D.B. until 1379 when Elizabeth, daughter and heir of Robert Passelew, brought it to William Purcell whose descendant John Spicer alias Purcell, conveyed it to William Lacon in 1461.⁴

The coat with bends and lion sinister-wise is probably a bungled version of the Passelew shield.

LAVENDON.

One of the faces of the octagonal, late 15th century font has a shield with three fleurs de lys. The *V.C.H.* blazons it "France Modern" though there are no traces of tinctures. The contemporary lords of the manor were the Peyvres who bore *three fleurs de lys on a cheveron*; and the contemporary vicar, 1454-1489, was William Husband.⁵ The arms of Huband are given in Burke's *General Armory* as *sable three fleurs de lys silver*; and though Professor Weekley shows that the names are distinct in origin they are so much alike as to be easily confused.

The Peyvres were descendants of Paul Peyvre, steward of Henry III, described by his contemporary, Matthew Paris, as a man of insatiable acquisitiveness; the extent of his possessions in Bucks alone lends colour to this description.

NORTH MARSTON.

The surveyors of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and of the *V.C.H.* alike failed to decipher the charges on three shields in the panels of the octagonal bowl of the 15th century font, which is illustrated in Lipscomb's *Bucks*, I, 346. They respectively describe them as "apparently not heraldic" and as

¹ Lipscomb, *Bucks*, III, 340.

² Burke, *Extinct Barts.*, 174; Baker's *Northants*, 470.

³ Knight's of Edward I. *Harl. Soc.* vol. 83, 7; *Rot. Hund.*, II, 337.

⁴ *V.C.H.*, III, 345.

⁵ Lipscomb's *Bucks*, IV, 208.

"much defaced"; the latter phrase applies properly to the shields once held by the angels on the stem below. The shields on the bowl bear

(1) Three chalices, Butler of Ireland?

(2) Two ragged staves in saltire, the badge of Richard Neville, the King Maker.

(3) A rose in a fetterlock, a badge of Edward IV.

Two other panels have roses of York in quatrefoils; the rest have foliage.

The manor of North Marston was held by the Botelers, Earls of Ormonde, from the beginning of the 15th century until 1460 when it was forfeited by attainder and given by Edward IV to Richard Neville.¹ The family arms of the Botelers were an indented chief but they also bore a coat of three cups in token of the office of Chief Butler of Ireland, from which they derived their name; it is used as a quartering by the present Duke of Ormonde. The cups on the font, however, are of chalice form with a knop and spreading foot, as in the arms of Pershore Abbey, while those of Butler are usually represented with covers.

Ragged staves were the well-known cognisance of the Neville earls of Warwick; as the Neville coat was a saltire two staves so disposed would be an appropriate arrangement.

Both the fetterlock and the rose were badges of the House of York as may be seen on the seal of Richard Duke of York, father of Edward IV, illustrated in Sandford's *Genealogical History of the Kings of England*, p. 352. The fetterlock was a badge of Mortimer, inherited from Edmund of Langley who perhaps, as Planché supposed, acquired it with his Spanish wife. Sandford says that he also used the white rose; but this was already a device of the Mortimers.²

NEWTON LONGVILLE.

The triangular panels of the octagonal pyramidal font-cover are carved with the Royal Supporters of the contemporary sovereign, James I, the leopard rampant and the unicorn, alternately. The beasts bear a kind of vexillum like that of the Paschal Lamb, a long staff, flowered at the ends, with narrow streamers much like those on a merchant's mark; this is an unusual feature, if not unique,³ though neither the *V.C.H.* nor the Monuments Commission record it. Under the feet of the animals is a spray of roses.

WESTON UNDERWOOD.

Each face of the octagonal stem of the font has a trefoil-headed panel containing a shield of arms:

(1) A chevron with three fleurs de lys thereon, Peyvre.

(2) Six piles the points meeting in base, John le Scot, Earl of Huntingdon?

¹ Lipscomb's *Bucks*, I, 333.

² Sandford, p. 357; Doyle, *Official Baronage*, II, 468.

³ But c.f. *V.C.H. Hants.*, IV, 322.

- (3) An embattled fesse between six crosslets fitchy with a crescent upon it. Olney.
- (4) A plain fesse, Dive.
- (5) An embattled fesse with three crosslets fitchy in chief, the base defaced, Olney?
- (6) A plain cross, Sutton.
- (7) An embattled fesse with a pierced molet thereon, Abberbury.
- (8) Two bars and in chief three crescents, Nowers.

The Historical Monuments Commission and the *V.C.H.* agree in dating the work to the 15th century; but since the arms of the Throckmortons, who obtained the manor and advowson by marriage with the heiress of Olney, in 1446, do not appear on it, the font must be earlier than this date. The church, a chapelry of Olney, was rebuilt as his brass records, by John Olney, who obtained parochial rights for it from Pope Gregory XI in 1376. This fact, and the presence of his arms and those of his wife, Dionysia Abberbury, suggest that the font is his gift, for the shield of his son's wife, the heiress of Bosun, does not appear. The other coats, also, are those of families whose connexion with the parish is of earlier date than the 15th century. The Peyvres, descendants of Paulin Peyvre who acquired lands in Weston from the Biduns in 1244, ended in an heiress who carried them to the Broughtons before the end of the 14th century; the Nowers of Gotehurst (Gayhurst) were the 14th century lords from whom John Olney purchased the manor in 4 Ric. II.¹ They bore *silver two bars and in chief three crescents gules*.² Both the *V.C.H.* and the Historical Monuments Commission read this coat as *two bars and in chief three roundels*; but the charges are clearly crescents. Both authorities ascribe the shield to Hungerford and the plain cross to Hussey, though these names only came into Weston's history at a much later date when, as is stated on her brass, dated 1553, Sir Robert Throckmorton of Weston married Elizabeth Hussey, widow of Walter Lord Hungerford. If the charges were really intended for roundels the shield would represent the Wakes who acquired the overlordship of Weston with Isabel daughter and coheir of William Brewer and held it until the death of Thomas Wake in 1349. Their shield occurs on the 13th century font at West Deeping, engraved in Simpson's *Ancient Baptismal Fonts* (1828), p. 39.

The plain cross may be for Alianor Sutton, John Olney's grandmother, whose father, William de Sutton or Socton, held lands in Weston in the 13th century. Burke's *General Armory* (1883), 988, ascribes *argent a cross sable* to a Nottinghamshire family of that name.

The shield with the plain fess is no doubt for Dive, an Oxfordshire family whose connexion with the Abberburys is shown by

¹ *V.C.H.*, IV, 498; Lipscomb's *Bucks*, IV, 398; *Rot. Hund.* II, 349.

² Visitation of Bucks. *Harl. Soc.*, LVIII, 138.

records in *Abbreviatio Rotulorum Originalium*, II, 84, 86, and by the collocation of their arms in South Newington church¹ and among the quarterings of the Wentworth shield at Burnham. Moreover Dionysia was an hereditary name in the Dive family, derived from Dionysia Bereford from who they inherited Barford St. Michael in Oxfordshire.² Dionysia Abberbury, wife of John Olney, must have been named after a Dive ancestress, though the pedigree, given in Macnamara's account of the Abberbury family in *The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal* IV, (1898), 49-60, does not mention her. Dionysia de Bereford was granddaughter and coheir of Wadard, a tenant of Bishop Odo, whose appearance in the Bayeux Tapestry, otherwise inexplicable, suggests that he was the bishop's agent in procuring it.

The pily coat may refer to the Honour of Huntingdon, of which lands in Weston, owned in D.B. by the Countess Judith, formed a part; her descendant, John le Scot, Earl of Huntingdon, bore a pily shield, as his seal on deeds at Balliol College attests.³ He granted lands at Weston to Sir William Olney.⁴ But the Bassets, lords of Olney, also bore a coat of three piles.

The *V.C.H.* blazons this shield as "a chief indented" but this is an obvious error, since the piles are separate and extend from the upper edge of the shield to its extreme point.

John Olney, the benefactor of Weston, is described as John Barker de Olney which suggests that he may have made money by the trade of tanning; but his ancestors for several generations had been freeholders in the neighbourhood.

OXFORDSHIRE.

CHALGROVE.

The cup-shaped font at Chalgrove, engraved by Skelton, dates from the Restoration period when the Act of Uniformity obliged the churchwardens to replace the medieval font cast out by the Puritans.

On the octagonal bowl are carved the royal badges, the fleur de lys, used both by the Tudors and by James I who derived his claim from them, the portcullis, two sprays of roses, the thistle of Scotland, and the Lacy Knot; the other two faces bear foliage of acanthus or thistle.

There is no symbol for Ireland, for though the Lacies were a great Anglo-Irish family their badge can hardly be supposed to

¹ *Oxfordshire Archaeological Soc.* (1875), 30; *Jour. British Arch. Ass.* (1938), 208.

² *Oxford Hist. Soc.*, XLIX (1907), Eynsham Cartulary I, 413.

³ *Oxford Hist. Soc.*, LXIV (1913), Oxford Deeds of Balliol College, ed. Salter, p. 363.; Doyle, *Official Baronage*, I, 366.

⁴ Lipscomb's *Bucks*, IV, 111.

THE ARMORIAL FONTS OF THE OXFORD DIOCESE.

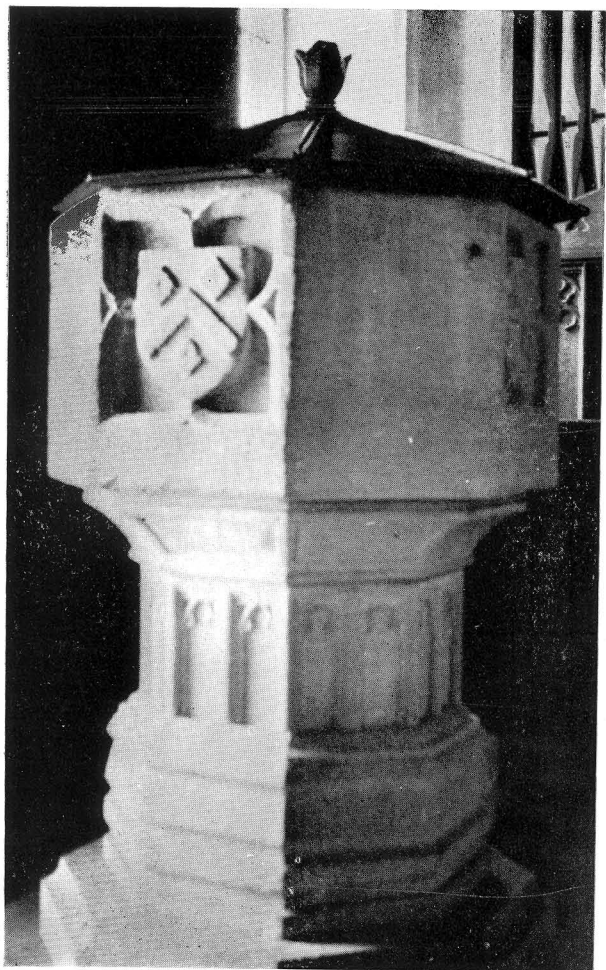


Photo : F. Sharpe.

PLATE III.

Fringford, Oxon. Font from North-east, 1941.

represent the country. There was a contemporary Oxfordshire family of the name, two of whom filled the office of High Sheriff in the 17th century, but they do not seem to have been connected with Chalgrove. The intricate interlacements of the Lacy Knot are intended to suggest the name. There is an illustration of the device on the counter-seal of Roger de Laschi, Constable of Chester, in the Catalogue of Seals in the British Museum, vol. III, plate 1.

The fleur de lys commemorates the descent of the English Royal House from Isabella of France; the portcullis has been said to play upon the name, Two-door, a pleasantry to which the Tudor motto, *altera securitas*, lends colour. But actually the badge, like the claim to the throne, was inherited from the Beauforts.¹

FRINGFORD.

The octagonal font at Fringford, apparently of the late 15th century, presents a problem beset with pitfalls and difficulties. Its four cardinal faces bear in quatrefoiled panels the following shields:

- (1) North; a cross paty between four martlets, Plessington.
- (2) West; a chevron between three eagles, Francis.
- (3) East; a chevron between three lozenges, Staveley. (*Plate No. III.*)
- (4) South; three doves, Sapcotes.

There is no doubt as to the identification of these coats, nor as to the pedigree they represent. The first three, in Rawlinson's time, 1718, were "painted on wainscoat" in the north aisle of Bicester church, and near them, "on a large raised tomb," was a brass inscription, now fixed to the north wall of the chancel.² It reads "Orate pro animabus Willelmi Staveley Armigeri quondam domini de Bygnell et Alicie uxoris ejus filie et unius heredis domini Johannis Fraunces militis et dominae Isabelle uxoris ejus filie et heredis domini Henrici Plesyngton militis qui quidem Willelmus obiit decimo die Octobris Anno Domini MCCCCLXXXVIII predicta vero Alicia obiit XX die Octobris Anno Domini MVc Quorum animabus propitiatur Deus." William Staveley had purchased the manor of Bignell in Bicester after 1464.³ Three of the coats on the font are thus accounted for; the fourth is explained by pedigrees given in the Visitations of Huntingdon (*Camden Society* 1847) 12) and Rutland (*Harleian Society*, III, 29, 46) which show that Jane, sister of Alice, co-heir of Sir John Francis by Isabel Plessington, married Thomas Sapcotes, second son of Sir Richard Sapcotes of Elton.

But none of these families had any connexion with Fringford until Margaret Staveley, grand-daughter of William Staveley and

¹ Fox-Davies, *Heraldic Badges* (1907), 143.

² *Oxford Record Soc.*, II (1920), 38.

³ White Kennett, *Parochial Antiquities*, II, 410.

Alice Francis, being daughter and heir of their son William, married Thomas Gifford of Fringford,¹ whose tomb at Twyford, Bucks, 1550 bears the Gifford and Staveley arms in brass, with three buck's faces on the Staveley cheveron, omitted on the font, perhaps from lack of skill in the craftsman or, more probably, from obliteration of the paint in which they were executed. Since the font does not bear the Gifford arms it cannot commemorate this marriage, and has therefore no obvious connexion with Fringford.

This seems to be put beyond doubt by Blomfield's account of it in his *Deanery of Bicester*, V, 30. "For many years," he says, "there stood near the south door an old font of curious design, with three coats-of-arms engraven on its sides. It belonged originally to the church of Cole Orton, Leicestershire, and was given by Sir G. Beaumont to Mr. Palmer, the Rector of Mixbury, who gave it to his brother-in-law, Mr. Roundell, for use in this church. Subsequently it was cut into an octagon shape." William Palmer was rector of Mixbury 1802-1853, and married in 1810 Dorothea Roundell, sister of Henry Roundell, who became rector of Frodingham 1815 and was buried there in 1852. Sir G. Beaumont was probably Sir George, 7th Baronet, died 1827, the friend of Wordsworth, who as a F.S.A. might be presumed to meddle with antiquities; he had been up at New College and his wife was a local woman, whose family lived at Astrop, a few miles from Mixbury. He was descended from the heiress of the Sapcotes of Elton, from whom he had inherited that manor,² and thus might well be in possession of a font bearing the arms of the Sapcotes and their ancestors.

But there are several difficulties in Blomfield's story. Though the Beaumonts had owned Cole Orton from the early 15th century the font cannot have belonged originally to Cole Orton for the families commemorated by it had even less connexion with that place than with Fringford: the Sapcotes marriage with Beaumont did not occur until 1614. Moreover Nichols writing in 1804³ describes its font, then standing "under the singing loft at the west end of the church," as "an old, round font." Whether or not this is still in existence at Cole Orton cannot be ascertained, the Rector ignoring letters of inquiry, and though the Fringford font might conceivably have been made for Elton after the marriage of Thomas Sapcote and Jane Francis, and subsequently removed to Cole Orton, yet both the *V.C.H. Hunts*, III, 161, and the Report of the Historical Monuments Commission (1930), 78, state that the church at Elton still retains its original font, an octagonal bowl with trefoiled panels of the early 14th century standing on a 15th century stem and plinth.

There is the further difficulty involved in Blomfield's account, that the Fringford font bears not three shields but four, and that

¹ Lipscomb's *Bucks*, III, 131, 5.

² Burke's *Extinct Barts*, 48; *Complete Peerage*, II, 67; *D.N.B.*

³ Nichol's *Leicestershire*, III, 740.

he describes none of them. It is hard to imagine, also, how a font already bearing shields could be recut as an octagon. This would mean, in any case, that the present shields date only from the last century. They are certainly crude work but they are definitely medieval in style. The choice of the existing coats, too, would on this hypothesis, be inexplicable, since neither Giffard, which would connect it with Fringford, nor Beaumont, which would connect it with Cole Orton, is included. Moreover the mouldings of the stem are typical of the 15th century. This part of the story seems, therefore, incredible. Although Blomfield gives various extracts from the Church Wardens' Accounts he does not mention any reference to the font; it has not been possible to induce the Rector either to examine them himself or to produce them for inspection.

How Fringford managed for a font before the arrival of this one Blomfield does not tell us. Wood and Rawlinson are equally silent as to the existence of any coats in the church, which is evidence that it was not here in their time. Parker, *Architectural Topography* (1850) remarks merely that "the font is curious." Fortunately the major problem of this essay, that of accounting for the coats on the font, is easily soluble. The other, of its provenance, must be left where it is until, if ever, further evidence is forthcoming. Meantime it remains a trap for the unwary, since while its heraldry is connected with the old lords of Fringford it has itself no original connexion with that place. Elton appears to be the only parish in which it would find itself at home; and that it was made for that church to replace an older font and subsequently in its turn supplanted by the original one and given to Fringford is the hypothesis that best fits the facts. It suffered a similar fate in 1880, when the Gothic simulacrum, now at the east end of the aisle, was presented to the parish, being cast out of the church to stand inverted in the cemetery until the early years of the present century.

SHIPTON-UNDER-WYCHWOOD.

Of the eight quatrefoiled panels on the bowl of the 15th century font at Shipton six contain lozenges of foliage, in two of which human faces are inset, one has a double rose on a lozenge with faint indications of rays, "the rose en soleil," a favourite badge of Edward IV, and one, on the east face, a shield with a bear and a ragged staff, the well-known cognisances of the Beauchamp Earls of Warwick and their successor, Richard Neville, the King Maker.¹

The manor of Shipton, having passed with Alianor, coheir of Gilbert de Clare, to Hugh le Despenser and with Isabel, daughter and heir of Thomas le Despenser, to Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, was brought to Richard Neville² by his marriage with

¹ Dugdale, *Baronage*, I, 246.

² *Ibid*, 307.

Anne Beauchamp, sister and heir of Henry, Duke of Warwick, in 1449, from which date he used the Beauchamp badge of the bear and ragged staff. But its conjunction with the rose en soleil shows that the font must belong to the years between 1461, when Edward IV obtained the crown, and 1470, when Warwick turned against him and forced him to fly to the Netherlands.

The Beauchamp bear was adopted in token of their descent from Urse Dabitol, the D.B. tenant of many of the lands which they inherited;¹ but the origin of the ragged staff is not so easily accounted for. As a primitive form of scaling ladder it was the punning cognisance of the Greys, and as such it appears on a 15th century fireplace at Stanlake Manor, Oxfordshire.² but there is nothing in their pedigree to connect it with Beauchamp. It may originally have been merely an appanage to the bear, the staff with which the beast, when taught to dance, supported his shuffling steps. Here is a problem which might be commended to readers as one of considerable heraldic and genealogical interest.

STANTON HARCOURT.

The graceful 15th century font at Stanton Harcourt, illustrated in Skelton's *Oxfordshire* (1823) and Paley's *Baptismal Fonts* (1844) is said both by Skelton and by Earl Harcourt, in some notes written in 1808, to have borne on three of its panels a shield of arms and on a fourth a cross with Gothic lettering.³ These ornaments, having become loose by some fissure of the stone, or perhaps because they were merely dowelled on, were removed for preservation to a frame on the west wall at a restoration in 1833. They bear, apparently in the restored tinctures of 1833, the coats recorded by Earl Harcourt.:

- (1) Gules two bars gold, Harcourt.
- (2) Silver three bends gules, Byron of Clayton.
- (3) Silver a chevron between three eagles gules, Francis of Foremark, impaling Harcourt.

"By a strange error, to have been committed in an age when the science of Heraldry was held in high estimation," as Earl Harcourt observes, "the arms of Francis are placed on the dexter instead of the sinister side. Sir Thomas Harcourt, who died in 1460, married Joan, daughter of Sir Robert Francis; but no female of the former family married into the latter." He adds that the arms of Byron show the donor of the font to be Sir Robert Harcourt, K.G., son of Sir Thomas, who married Margaret Byron and died in 1471.⁴ He was High Steward of the University 1446, M.P. Oxon 1450 and Sheriff 1455.⁵ Two other panels bear a rose,

¹ Round, *Feudal England*, 170.

² Plate III, *Oxfordsh. Arch. Soc. Report*, 1940.

³ Parker's *Architectural Guide* (1846), 175, 8.

⁴ Lipscomb's *Bucks*, IV, 590; Burke's *History of the Commoners*, II, 221.

⁵ Davenport's *High Sheriffs* (1888), 39.

probably the White Rose of York, in whose cause he died. The arms of Harcourt impaling Byron in a south window suggest that he was responsible for the addition of the mortuary chapel in which he is buried. The Byron bends are there enhanced into the upper cantle of the shield; on the font they are disposed in the usual way. It may be noted that Sir Robert's Garter encircles an impaled shield: the exclusion of a wife's arms from the Garter insignia is a modern innovation. The Gothic letters on the font are said by Parker to be I.H.C. But there are only two, and though broken, as they appear in Skelton's engraving, they look more like the R H of Robert Harcourt. Paley reads them as K and R.

The arms prove that Joan Francis was of the same family as Jane and Alice, daughters of Sir John Francis, whose shield is on the font at Fringford, and Joyce, daughter of Sir Robert Francis, wife of William Greville who impales her arms on his tomb at Drayton near Banbury¹ but their precise relationship has not been elucidated.

A wife's arms were often given precedence when she was of conspicuously higher rank than her husband. In the case of the Harcourt-Francis impalement, however, the reversal of the usual arrangement must be, as Lord Harcourt suggested, an error of the craftsman.

¹ Visitation Gloucestershire. *Harl. Soc.*, XXI, 214.