



NO. 1. ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER.



NO. 2. ST. ANDREW UNDERSHAFT.



NO. 3. STANMORE, MIDDLESEX.

FONTS SCULPTURED BY NICHOLAS STONE.

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Examples of renaissance fonts are met with in various parts of England, and nearly all of them are of the chalice type, connecting in beautiful symbolism the two great sacraments of the Christian Church. The artists who designed renaissance fonts in the seventeenth century were seriously hampered in their efforts, as they were forced to comply with the practice of aspersion, and consequently they did not construct their fonts with those fine and ample proportions which were needful when immersion was required. "During this period," says a recent writer, "the utter absence of liturgical propriety produced fonts more appropriate to a pedestal sundial, so small was the bowl, in some cases the smallest part of the structure."²

The city of London is particularly rich in renaissance fonts, and most of them were made for Sir Christopher Wren's new churches. However, a few of these classical fonts are of an earlier date,³ and this paper deals with those made by Nicholas Stone during the years 1631 to 1641.

In Nicholas Stone's account-book we find the following :

"This 13 of November 1631 agreed with Mr. Jones Chearch warden of St. Andrew Under Shaft in London in pessance of Mr. Godfray and som 2 mor of the anchants of thar Vestry to mak for thar Charch on font the boll to be of whit marbell 20 inches deameter and to stand on a pillar of blak marbell farly wrort and poleshed and set up for the price of 16*£* to be done as son as may be."

In Stone's note-book we meet with this entry :

"In 1634 I mad a monument for on Mr. Harison and sett it up in St. Andres under Shaft London and had 40*£* and in the sam Chearch I sett up a fount I had for it 15*£*."

¹ Read before the Institute, 7th May, 1913.

² J. C. Wall, *Porches and Fonts*, p. 325.

³ There are chalice fonts in Canterbury and Exeter cathedral churches. The one

at Exeter was made in 1644 for the christening of Henrietta, youngest daughter of king Charles I, who was born on 21st July, 1644, in Bedford House, Exeter, and christened in the cathedral when only a fortnight old.

The price given for the font in the note-book differs by one pound from that mentioned in the account-book. The latter is no doubt the correct figure as it was made at the time.

St. Andrew Undershaft was rebuilt early in the sixteenth century (1520-1532), and was named from the maypole in the shadow of which it stood. The font (plate I, no. 2) stands at the west end of the church: the wooden railings enclosing it are of about the same date, and it seems probable that they were originally the altar rails set up in the time of Laud. The moulded bowl¹, having octagonal faces with a circular rim, is cut out of a block of white marble and has a circular basin, but no drain. The pedestal² of "blak marbell farly wrort and poleshed" is in excellent proportion, and is now placed on a black and white marble pavement.

The font-cover³ was probably executed about the same time as the pulpit which has been attributed to Grinling Gibbons. It may, however, have been designed by Sir Christopher Wren. The font-cover is octagonal in form, having eight panels⁴ adorned at the corners with cherubs whose wings are folded alternately upwards and downwards. At this period these winged cherubs were a favourite device, and possibly indicate the essentially human ideals of the renaissance. They are obviously most suitable for the adornment of fonts and font-covers. A dome of two tiers rests on this base, and on the lantern is a circular vase⁵ filled with roses, supporting a crown.

Nicholas Stone's note-book contains this entry respecting the other two fonts he made for London churches: "On other font at London Wall 8*l* and on at Westminster in the new Chapell in Tutell filds 10*l*." The first of these fonts is no longer existing, and the present font at All Hallows, London Wall, is not the work of Nicholas Stone. The late bishop of London found a bowl in the crypt of St. Paul's cathedral and presented it to the rector and churchwardens of All Hallows

¹ Depth of bowl (exterior), 11 ins; diameter of bowl, 11½ ins; depth of bowl (interior), 8½ ins.

² Height of pedestal, 2 ft. 11 ins. It stands on a plinth, 1 ft. 5 ins. by 8 ins. by 8 ins.

³ Height of font-cover, 3 ft. 6 ins.

⁴ Each panel is 7¾ ins. by 6¾ ins.

⁵ The vase is 5 ins. in height with a circumference of 11 ins.

and they had a new shaft made for it. Respecting the one made for Westminster the account-book contains this entry: stops, which are absent in the original, have been added.

“The 16th of Aprill 1641.”

“For a Font of white Marble, and Blake Marble, wrought and sett up in the newe Chappell in Tutthill feildes in Westminster, as followeth: Imprimis. On the ground, one great broad stone of 4 foote long, 3 foote and an halfe broad, and 8 inches thick, wrought with a molding, whereon is placed a basement of Blacke Marble, and thereon a Pillar of white Marble, wch doth support the bole of the Font, being 20 ynches in diameter and 1 fotte thicke, of white Marble, wch a small hole through it and through the Pillar, and consequently through the whole worke, to carrye the water away into a vault underneath itt; all wch worke is fairly wrought, molded, pollished, and glased, and sett up in the place aforesaid for the price of £10 00 0.”

This entry is probably in the handwriting of John Stone, Nicholas Stone's youngest son. It will be noticed that there is great difference in style between Nicholas Stone's notes and those of his son John. The former was “the sculptor” and the latter “the scholar” who begins “*Imprimis*” and whose style is somewhat pedantic. The details given about the construction of the drain and the carrying away of the water are interesting, and this was evidently stipulated for, as there are no drains in the fonts made by Nicholas Stone at St. Andrew Undershaft or at Stanmore.

When the present dean of Durham was rector of St. Margaret's, Westminster, he found Nicholas Stone's font stored away in the crypt, and soon after the coronation of king Edward VII he removed the modern font of conventional design, replacing it by the older one, and adding a new marble step.¹ There is no doubt that the font² found by the rector of St. Margaret's (plate 1, no 1) was the one made by Nicholas Stone, as it corresponds sufficiently with the description given in the note-book to identify it, viz. a basement of black marble, with a white

¹ The font is now placed in the south-west corner of the church.

² The diameter of the basin is 1 ft. 4½ ins. the rim is 1½ ins; consequently the full diameter across the bowl is 19½ ins. The

internal depth of the basin is 6¾ ins, and the external depth of the bowl, 9¾ ins. The white marble pedestal is 2 ft. in height, and the black marble plinth 1 ft. 1¾ ins. square by 7 ins. high.

marble pedestal and bowl. Stone gives 20 inches as the diameter of the bowl and 1 foot for the depth. The actual measurements, however, are $19\frac{3}{4}$ inches for the diameter and $9\frac{3}{4}$ inches for the depth of the bowl. Stone's description is an estimate and specification for the work before it was carried out, and was, therefore, subject to some slight alteration in dimensions in execution.

The reference in Nicholas Stone's note-book to the font he made for the old Stanmore church runs: "On for ser John Worsnom in his new Chearch at Standmor for the which he payed me 12*£*." Sir John Wolstenholme was one of the richest merchants in England, and he built the old Stanmore church, and archbishop Laud, at that time bishop of London, wrote in his diary, "1632, Julii 17. Tuesday, I consecrated the Church at Stanmore Magna in Middlesex, built by Sir John Wolstenham." As the church was consecrated in 1632 we may assume that this was the date of the font, as it would probably be one of the last things placed in it before consecration. In 1881 the font was removed to the new church at Stanmore, and it now stands at the west end. This font (plate 1, no. 3) has a white marble bowl¹ having octagonal faces and a moulded octagonal rim. The black marble pedestal² is also octagonal in form, possessing a comparatively short shaft with a deep moulded base and low octagonal plinth. The bowl is adorned with four shields of arms placed on the alternate faces. One is charged with the Wolstenholme coat of arms,³ and another with the crest,⁴ a rather unusual and unheraldic circumstance.

Nicholas Stone's font in St. John's, Stanmore,⁵ has a very shallow bowl, and the pedestal would have appeared more dignified if it were set on a larger base. In ancient times the step for the godparents always gave the appearance of a base for the font.

¹ Depth of bowl (exterior), $10\frac{1}{2}$ ins. (interior), $7\frac{1}{2}$ ins; diameter of basin, 1 ft. 3 ins. The wooden font-cover is 1 ft. 6 in. in height, consisting of a circular moulded base on which stand eight panels, $6\frac{1}{2}$ ins. by 3 ins. decorated with flowers and fruit, and on these rests a dome adorned with eight bands ornamented with pellets.

² Height of pedestal, 3 ft. 1 in.

³ Az. a lion pass. guard. between three pheons or.

⁴ An eagle displ. or standing on a snake, mowed vert.

⁵ The Stanmore font is figured on p. 324 of J. C. Wall's *Porches and Fonts*.