

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON FONTS WITH REPRESENTATIONS  
OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS.<sup>1</sup>

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Since my paper on "Fonts with representations of the Seven Sacraments" appeared in the *Journal*<sup>2</sup> another font belonging to this series had to be recorded in 1906,<sup>3</sup> and Mr. George C. Druce, F.S.A. has now kindly drawn my attention to a font at Earsham, in Norfolk, which must also be included in this group of fonts. There are at present existing as many as thirty-one examples of this type of font in England: seventeen in Norfolk,<sup>4</sup> twelve in Suffolk,<sup>5</sup> one in Kent,<sup>6</sup> and one in Somersetshire.<sup>7</sup>

The font in All Saints church, Earsham (plate 1), stands on an octagonal step decorated on each face<sup>8</sup> with a shallow trefoil-headed niche set on either side of a quatrefoil, somewhat similar in arrangement to the step for the font at Binham priory in the same county.

The octagonal pedestal, 1 foot 9 inches deep, was originally adorned with eight statues standing in niches, but they have been so seriously mutilated that no vestige of them can now be traced. At Cratfield, where a variant of this font may be seen<sup>9</sup> (plate 11), these figures represent St. Paul, St. John, St. James, and five other saints, so it is possible that the same arrangement existed also at Earsham. The base, which measures 9 inches in height, is moulded, and at the corners are mutilated figures which were probably intended for the four evangelists, with alternate repre-

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Institute, 7th May, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Journ.* lix, 17-66.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch. Journ.* lxxiii, 102-105. The font referred to was the one in the church of St. Nicholas, Denston, Suffolk.

<sup>4</sup> Binham priory, Brooke, Burgh-next-to-Aylsham, Cley, Earsham, East Dereham, Great Witchingham, Little Walsingham, Gresham, Loddon, Marsham, Martham,

Norwich cathedral, Sall, Sloley, Walsoken, and West Lynn.

<sup>5</sup> Badingham, Blythburgh, Cratfield, Denston, Gorleston, Great Glenham, Laxfield, Melton, Southwold, Westhall, Weston, and Woodbridge.

<sup>6</sup> Farningham.

<sup>7</sup> Nettlecombe.

<sup>8</sup> Each face 1 ft. 3 ins. by 9½ ins.

<sup>9</sup> *Arch. Journ.* lix, 39.

sentations of their well-known emblems. Eight half-angels, holding uncharged shields, support the octagonal bowl,<sup>1</sup> and at the angles are eight mutilated statues under canopies.

The eight faces of the bowl, each 1 foot by  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches, are panels upon which representations of the seven Sacraments are sculptured, while the Crucifixion is depicted on the eighth panel. The proper order for the Sacraments is: Baptism, Confirmation, holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, holy Orders, and Matrimony. It is curious to observe that this order is rarely followed, and, what is more, the same order is rarely carried out on any two fonts. The sacraments portrayed on the Earsham font, however, can be arranged in the correct sequence, although the artist has placed the eighth panel between the sculptures representing Extreme Unction and holy Orders. His object was evidently to place the panel for the Crucifixion facing the west so that the one for the holy Eucharist should face east, nearest to the altars in the church.

Baptism is denoted by a priest, vested in surplice and stole, immersing a nude infant in an octagonal font. Two acolytes, vested in long surplices, hold the open ritual and an object probably intended for the chrismatory.

In the panel representing Confirmation we find a bishop, vested in a rochet, confirming an infant held by a man in a gown. Two ecclesiastics accompany the bishop and are vested in surplices, while a woman holding an infant is ready to present it to the bishop for the rite of confirmation. The child is held by a godfather or a godmother according as it is a boy or a girl.

In the sculpture portraying the celebration of the holy Eucharist a priest, vested in alb and chasuble, stands before an altar elevating the Host. Five other figures are depicted, and one is evidently the server, holding what was probably intended for a tall candle or torch.

Penance is represented by a priest, vested in surplice, and seated in an arm-chair. His right hand is placed on the head of a kneeling penitent, and his left rests on his knee. There are three standing figures and another

<sup>1</sup> Depth of bowl and chamfer, 1 ft. 9 ins.; internal depth of bowl, 1 ft. 1 in; diameter of basin, 1 ft. 9 ins.



FONT AT EARSHAM, NORFOLK, WITH REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS.

kneeling penitent. In more than half of the panels depicting the Sacrament of penance on these fifteenth-century fonts we find an angel with wings spread widely over both confessor and penitent, while the evil spirit, with horned head and dragon wings, is departing with his tail between his legs, cast down and confounded. This sly touch of humour is not found on the Earsham font.

Extreme Unction shows a dying man in his bed. The coverlet is turned down, and the priest, vested in surplice and stole, is anointing his breast. Two acolytes, vested in long surplices, hold objects probably intended for the open ritual and the casket of oils. The bed of the dying man has presented some difficulty to the sculptor, who has depicted it raised up and placed at an angle of some forty-five degrees. One figure kneels near the bed, while a woman, probably intended for the wife of the dying man, stands behind it. She has long hair and her hand rests on her breast.

The panel representing holy Orders shows a bishop, vested in rochet and cope, holding a pastoral staff in his left hand, ordaining a kneeling candidate. There are two other kneeling candidates for the sacred ministry, and the bishop is accompanied by two ecclesiastics vested in surplices. One is probably intended for the archdeacon who presents the candidates to the bishop.

In the sculpture for Matrimony a priest, vested in alb, amice, and crossed stole, is uniting the hands of a man and woman. The priest is accompanied by two acolytes, and there is a kneeling figure in the foreground.

This series of fifteenth-century fonts is octagonal in form and, as the Sacraments are only seven in number, the eighth panel has to be filled in with some other subject. The Baptism of Christ,<sup>1</sup> the Last Judgment,<sup>2</sup> the Assumption of the blessed Virgin,<sup>3</sup> the Martyrdom of St. Andrew,<sup>4</sup> St. Francis of Assisi kneeling before a crucifix,<sup>5</sup> the holy Trinity,<sup>6</sup> Communion of the people,<sup>7</sup> and Christ in Glory<sup>8</sup> are portrayed, while on two fonts<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Badingham, Binham priory, Gresham, Laxfield, Sloley, Westhall and Weston.

<sup>2</sup> Gorleston, Marsham and Martham.

<sup>3</sup> Great Witchingham and Loddon.

<sup>4</sup> Melton.

<sup>5</sup> Burgh-next-to-Aylsham.

<sup>6</sup> West Lynn.

<sup>7</sup> Farningham.

<sup>8</sup> Nettlecombe.

<sup>9</sup> Blythburgh and Southwold.

this panel has been completely defaced, and possibly in the case of Cley it has never been executed. However, the favourite subject has been the Crucifixion, and it is sculptured in the eighth panel on half these fonts.<sup>1</sup> This is the case at Earsham, and on either side of the sadly mutilated figure of the crucified Saviour stand figures representing the blessed Virgin and St. John the Evangelist.

The various panels on the Earsham font depicting the seven Sacraments, show that the sculptor seized upon the most striking features in each ceremonial rite. In Baptism it is the actual moment when the priest is about to immerse the infant, the laying on of hands in Confirmation and holy Orders, the elevation of the Host in the holy Eucharist, the shriving of a penitent in Penance, and the act of anointing in Extreme Unction. He has also shown considerable ability in his treatment of the subjects, for the size of the panels limited him to the introduction of comparatively few figures.

It is probable that this font was sculptured by the same artist who designed the beautiful one at Cratfield (plate II). Both fonts stand on an octagonal step ornamented with quatrefoils<sup>2</sup>; both have their pedestals adorned with seated figures of the four evangelists and the four living creatures, as well as eight statues placed under canopies; both bowls are supported by half angels, statues in niches adorn the angles of the bowl, while in each case the upper chamfer of the panels is decorated with a series of quatrefoils forming a border,<sup>3</sup> which is not met with on any other of this series of fonts with representation of the seven Sacraments.

<sup>1</sup> Brooke, Cratfield, Denston, Earsham, East Dereham, Great Glenham, Little Walsingham, Norwich cathedral, Sall, Walsoken and Woodbridge.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Journ.* lix, 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch. Journ.* lix, 43.



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