

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON FONTS WITH REPRESENTATIONS
OF THE SEVEN SACRAMENTS.¹

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Since my paper on 'Fonts with representations of the Seven Sacraments' appeared in the *Journal*² a font at Denston, Suffolk, was recorded in 1906,³ and one at Earsham, Norfolk, in 1913,⁴ and now Mr. F. T. S. Houghton, M.A., F.S.A. has kindly drawn my attention to fonts at Gayton Thorpe and Seething in Norfolk, which must also be included in this group of fonts. There are at present existing as many as thirty-three examples of this type of font in England; nineteen in Norfolk,⁵ twelve in Suffolk,⁶ one in Kent,⁷ and one in Somerset.⁸

The bowl⁹ at Gayton Thorpe is an octagon, like all those belonging to this class, and the chamfer is adorned with heater-shaped shields.¹⁰ The panels of the bowl are enclosed in mouldings which are continued through the corners of the chamfer and pillar,¹¹ ending in octagonal bases inserted in the plinth.¹² Each face of the pedestal is adorned with a shallow niche placed in a rectangular panel.

Seven faces¹³ of the octagonal bowl contain sculptured representations of the Seven Sacraments and the eighth panel portrays the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Child. The Mother of our Lord is crowned and seated on a carved throne holding the Holy Child on her knee. This is the only instance where the subject is treated on the eighth

¹ Read before the meeting of the Institute, 1 Dec. 1920.

² *Arch. Journ.* lix, 17-66.

³ *Ibid.* lxiii, 102-105.

⁴ *Ibid.* lxx, 141-144.

⁵ Binham priory, Brooke, Burgh-next-Aylsham, Cley, Earsham, East Dereham, Gayton Thorpe, Great Witchingham, Little Walsingham, Gresham, Loddon, Marsham, Martham, Norwich cathedral, Sall, Seething, Sloley, Walsoken and West Lynn.

⁶ Badingham, Blythburgh, Cratfield, Denston, Gorleston, Great Glemham,

Laxfield, Melton, Southwold, Westhall, Weston and Woodbridge.

⁷ Farningham.

⁸ Nettlecombe.

⁹ Bowl and chamfer = 1 ft. 8 in. (bowl = 14 in., chamfer = 6 in.) Rim = 4½ to 5½ in. Interior depth = 10 in. Diameter (interior) = 1 ft. 9 in.

¹⁰ 6½ by 5 in.

¹¹ Each face = 1 ft. 4½ in. by 7 in. and the shallow niche = 12½ in. by 3½ in.

¹² Octagonal plinth = 7 in. by 10 in. by 3 in.

¹³ 1 ft. 2 in. by 1 ft.

panel of this series of fonts, yet it would seem specially appropriate to the fifteenth-century sculptor, as Gayton Thorpe Church is dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin.

The panel for Baptism depicts a priest, vested in surplice and crossed stole, preparing to immerse an infant in an octagonal font possessing a particularly large plinth. There are two acolytes in long surplices, one of whom holds the open ritual, while a woman stands with the chrisom cloth in her hands.

In the compartment representing Confirmation we find the bishop vested in rochet, cope and tall mitre, confirming an infant¹ held by a woman. There is another figure probably intended for a man.

In the sculpture portraying the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, a priest, vested in alb and crossed stole, is communicating a woman in a veil and a man in hose and tunic. Both figures are kneeling and the altar rail has a houseling-cloth on it.²

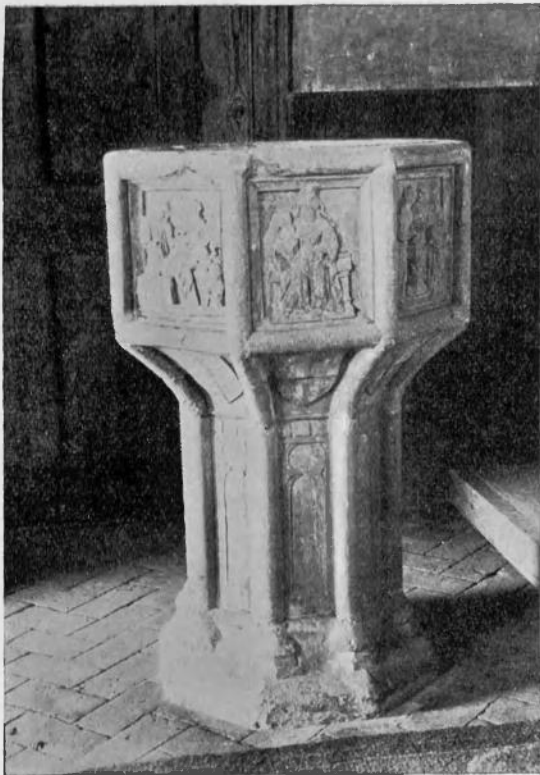
The compartment in which Penance is depicted shows the priest, vested in surplice and crossed stole, seated in a carved chair. A woman penitent kneels at a faldstool, being presented by an angel with wings spread widely over both confessor and penitent. The evil spirit, with horned head and dragon wings, is departing cast down and confounded.

The sculpture portraying Extreme Unction represents the dying person on a bed: the priest, vested in surplice and crossed stole, is anointing him with the holy oil in the form of a cross upon the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, feet, etc. and at each anointing using the appointed prayer. Two acolytes stand near the priest: one holds the open ritual, and the other probably held the casket containing the holy

¹ The synod of Exeter, A.D. 1287, decreed 'that children receive the Sacrament of Confirmation within three years of their birth, if they have the opportunity of being brought to their own or some other bishop: otherwise their parents shall fast on bread and water every Friday until they are confirmed.' Hence in this panel we find infants presented to the bishop, and the child is held by the godfather or the godmother, according as it is a boy or a girl. The bishop used sometimes to give confirmation on horseback as he passed

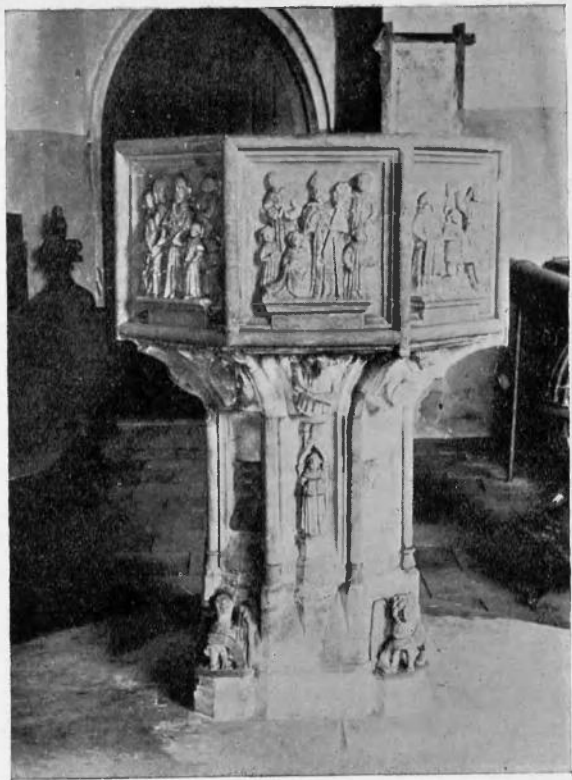
through a village. St. Hugh of Lincoln (Thurston, *Life of St. Hugh*, p. 197) we are told, however, dismounted with great reverence as if he had been in his cathedral. Other bishops do not seem to have been so particular.

² At Great Glemham and Woodbridge the priest has left the chalice on the altar and has turned towards a man and a woman in order to communicate them. In both instances the priest is simply vested in alb and crossed stole, while the communicants hold the houseling-cloth before them.



NO. 1. GAYTON THORPE.

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NO. 2. SEETHING.

PLATE I.

oil, which forms the 'matter' of this Sacrament and is always blessed by the bishop on Maundy Thursday.¹ Above the bed is a mutilated figure which may possibly have represented an angel awaiting the soul of the dying person, while a woman kneeling near the bed may be intended for the wife of the man who is being anointed.

The panel for Holy Orders portrays the bishop vested in amice, alb, dalmatic, chasuble and tall mitre. The archdeacon with clasped hands presents the candidates, three in number, one of whom is vested in alb, amice and chasuble and the other two in albs and crossed stoles.

In the sculpture representing Matrimony, a priest, vested in alb and crossed stole, is uniting the hands of a man and woman. The bride's bodice has tight-fitting sleeves, and the bridegroom wears a long gown. Two other figures stand behind.

The font in the church of St. Margaret, Seething, Norfolk, is remarkably perfect and possesses many interesting details. The moulding round the panels of the octagonal bowl² is continued, as in the case of the font at Gayton Thorpe, through the corners of the chamfer and the pedestal,³ ending in tall bases inserted in the plinth.⁴ The chamfer is adorned with eight angels, four of whom hold heater-shaped shields and four have scrolls. Some are evidently intended for archangels, as the letters *Geb. Mi.* and *Ur*⁵ can still be deciphered.

The pillar is decorated with statues of the four Latin Fathers of the Church standing on pedestals under crocketed canopies. One holds an open book, the second a closed volume, the third has his hands folded in prayer, and the fourth has a scroll.

Baptism is denoted by a priest, vested in surplice and stole, who is immersing an infant in a font which is a

¹ In the Western Church there were three ceremonial oils blessed on Maundy Thursday, the oil for the catechumens, the oil for the sick, and the chrism or scented unguent for baptism, confirmation, ordaining of priests, and consecration of bishops. The first two of these were of pure oil of olives, but the third was a compound of oil and balm. Subsequently various aromatic spices were mingled in the composition. Balm was

brought from the Holy Land as early as the sixth century.

² Bowl and chamfer — 1 ft. 9 in. (bowl — 15 in., chamfer — 6 in.) Rim = 5 to 6 in. Interior depth = 11 in. Diameter (interior) = 1 ft. 9 in. Each panel = 13 in. by 13 in.

³ Each face = 1 ft. 2 in. by 7 in.

⁴ Each face = 11 by 7½ in.

⁵ Gabriel, Michael and Uriel.

copy of fourteenth-century work, possibly representing an earlier font at Seething. The panel is somewhat crowded with figures, containing three ecclesiastical persons (two probably intended for acolytes), three laymen, and a woman in a bodice with tight-fitting sleeves.

In the compartment depicting Confirmation a bearded bishop with long hair, vested in rochet, is confirming infants. A priest stands near him and an acolyte holds the open ritual. The candidates for the rite of confirmation consist of three infants and are carried by a man and two women.

The sculpture for the Holy Eucharist shows a priest, vested in alb, amice and chasuble having a Latin cross on the back, standing before the altar and elevating the Sacred Host¹ with both hands. Two figures kneel, one on either side of the altar, and on a step behind are the crucifer holding the processional cross, and an acolyte with a lighted torch.

Penance is portrayed by a priest, who is seated in a high-backed chair, while the kneeling penitent is shielded by an angel with outspread wings, and the evil spirit is departing crestfallen. At the back of the panel are three ecclesiastical figures: two are tonsured and one is bearded and has long hair. It is possible that the artist did not intend them to assume this somewhat inquisitive position, and their presence only indicates other persons in the church beside the priest and the penitent. Figures are depicted somewhat in the same position on the sculpture representing this Sacrament at Little Walsingham, but in this case the three heads are seen over a curtain hung from rods.

The panel for Extreme Unction depicts a priest, vested in alb and crossed stole, anointing a sick person lying on a particularly high bed. There are two acolytes in attendance; one holds the open ritual and the other probably held the casket of holy oil. There are four other figures.

The sculpture of Holy Orders portrays the bishop, vested in alb, cope fastened with a large morse and a tall mitre. He wears a beard and long hair. The candidate for the priesthood is vested in alb and chasuble, and those for the diaconate in albs and dalmatics. The archdeacon and other ecclesiastics are present.

¹ The wafer is represented as an oval with a Latin cross stamped on it.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is represented at that crucial point in the ceremony when the priest is uniting the hands of a couple. He is vested in alb and crossed stole and wears a beard and long hair. Two acolytes accompany him, one of whom holds the open ritual. As well as the bride and bridegroom, there are two other persons; and our Lord is represented at the back of the panel emblematic of His blessing marriage at Cana of Galilee. The traditional face of Christ is well portrayed: the hair is long, there is a circular nimbus, and His vesture consists of an alb and crossed stole.

The sculpture on the eighth compartment represents the Baptism of our Lord; and this scriptural subject is represented on eight¹ of these fifteenth-century fonts. St. John the Baptist stands on a rock pouring water out of a shell on the head of our Lord, who is in the Jordan, while the angel on the opposite side of the river holds His clothes.

The font at Sloley, Norfolk, is a variant of the one at Seething. The mouldings round the panels of both bowls are continued down the corners of the chamfers and the pillars, while the faces of the chamfer are adorned with angels. On the Seething font they hold shields and scrolls, but on the Sloley chamfer they have only shields. Both stems possess four statues on tall pedestals and as many four-leaf flowers: each base has the symbols of the four Evangelists and the sculpture adorning the bowls rests on low pedestals.²

The proper order for the Sacraments is Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony. It is curious, however, to observe that this order is rarely followed, and, what is more, the same arrangement is rarely carried out on any two fonts. So we are led to the conclusion that the artists who designed the sculptures placed them where they thought good. On the two fonts now under our consideration we find that Holy Orders and Confirmation are on opposite sides, each requiring the introduction of a bishop,³ and on both fonts the sculpture for the Holy Eucharist is opposite

¹ Badingham, Binham priory, Gresham, Laxfield, Seething, Sloley, Westhall and Weston.

² At Seething the low pedestal is $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 2 in.

³ This arrangement is found at Loddon.

the eighth panel; but there is no fixed arrangement for the eighth panel, although in several instances it is facing west, which appears to have been the situation most preferred. On the Seething font, the compartments representing the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Unction are placed on opposite sides, as if to indicate that they were the first and last received.¹ It is doubtful, however, if the craftsmen had any fixed rule when they arranged the panels.

It requires the exercise of all our powers of imagination to picture to our minds the beauty of these fifteenth-century fonts when they were rich in their adornment of colour. There are vestiges of paint still to be found on the Seething font as well as on those at Badingham, East Dereham, Nettlecombe, West Lynn, and other places, while at Great Witchingham and Westhall the gilding is still brilliant, and the red, blue, green and black paint is quite fresh. Colour decoration in East Anglia has always been noted for its excellence, and, when these fonts were originally decorated, they must have presented a most beautiful design in colour adornment. The medieval system of colour designs more or less followed the rules of heraldry: thus fillets of gold or white would separate red mouldings from green ones, coloured grounds were powdered over with gold or white devices, and gilded carvings would possess backgrounds of blue. There was greater liberality in the use of gold in East Anglian decoration than in the schemes of colour employed either in the West of England or the Midlands. These bowls with their eight panels of sculpture, each less than a square foot in area and containing several figures, would be highly decorative. The use of clear bright colours carefully divided and mixed would blend in a most harmonious composition, while the chamfers with their sculptured angels and shields, and pedestals adorned with painted figures under gilded canopies, with seated figures of the Evangelists or their symbols at the corners of the bases, would be wonderfully effective.

In Eastern art the superiority of certain figures is frequently shown by their increased stature over those

¹ Examples are met with at Binham priory, Brooke, Loddon, Great Witchingham, etc.

around them. In the same manner some of the sculptors have introduced a similar method in their carvings upon these fifteenth-century fountains. This is particularly noticeable in the Gayton Thorpe sculpture, where the stature of the ecclesiastics is far greater than that of the laity to whom they are ministering. A still more striking example may be seen in the height of the priest in the compartment depicting Matrimony on the Sloley font,¹ which would make it appear that he was uniting the hands of a boy and a girl instead of a man and a woman.

¹ See *Arch. Journ.* lix, pl. xv, 2.