

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON LEADEN FONTS.¹

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FonTS have always taken a high place in Christian art, and among the small but important class of English fonts made of lead one more must be added to those that have already been recorded,² so that the total number now known to exist is thirty-one.³

Until recently the church of St. Margaret, Halstow, Kent, possessed a font which appeared to be devoid of artistic beauty, consisting apparently of a rectangular mass of plaster containing a lead lining used as a basin. The font was attached to the western side of the north arcade, and was supported on a central octagonal pillar possessing a circular capital and base and two small western shafts. During the great war the concussion caused by the powerful anti-aircraft guns posted on the banks of the Medway cracked the plaster round the basin. In the early summer of 1921 the vicar of St. Margaret's, Halstow (the Rev. E. R. Olive), sent for the local mason to repair the damage, and the workman opened out the plaster to the leaden basin, and then discovered that the exterior was richly ornamented. This newly-discovered leaden font⁴ is of twelfth-century craftsmanship, and may be dated about 1150. It is cylindrical in form⁵ and is adorned with Norman arcades containing full-length figures (plate 1).⁶ In classification by design this font comes under the series of Norman bowls where the chief feature is a large arcade containing

¹ Read before the Institute, 7th Dec., 1921.

² See *Arch. Journ.* lvii, 40-51; lviii, 97-102; lxx, 287-288; also Weaver's *English Lead Work*, 1-22.

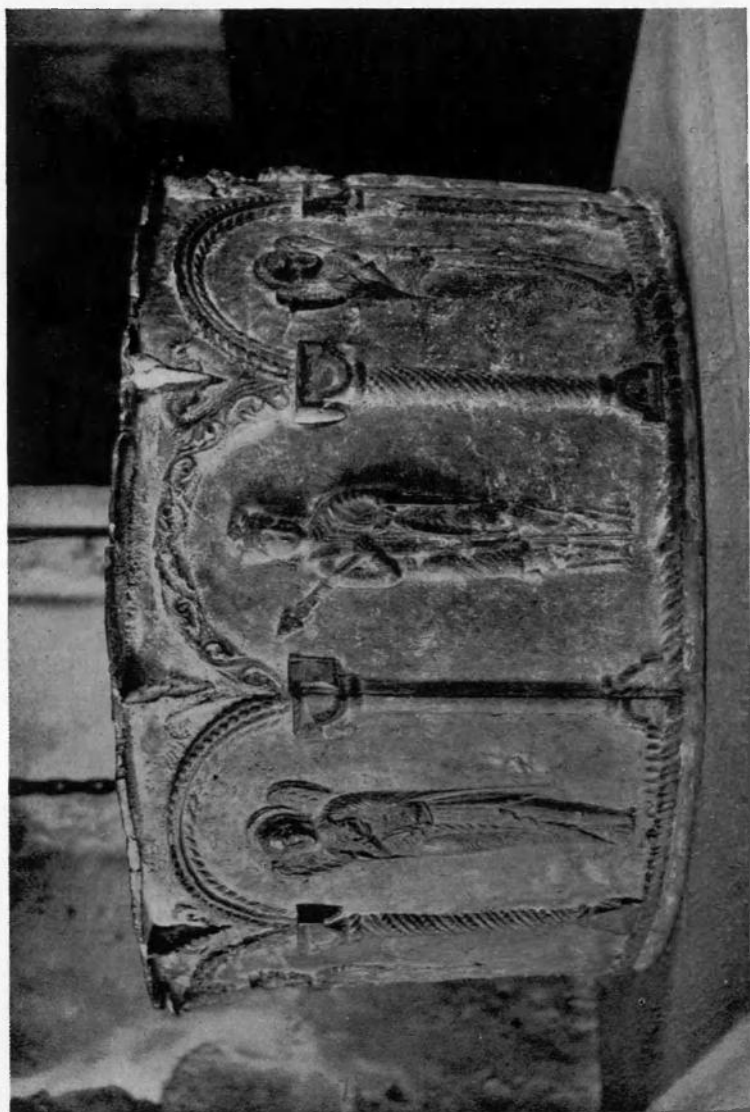
³ *Berkshire*: Childrey, Long Wittenham (13th cent.), Woolstone (Norman). *Buckinghamshire*: Penn (date uncertain). *Derbyshire*: Ashover (Norman). *Dorset*: Wareham (Norman). *Gloucestershire*: Frampton-on-Severn, Lancut (preserved at Sedbury Park, Lancut church being in ruins), Siston, Oxenhall, Tidenham, Sandhurst (these six are Norman and all cast from the same patterns), Haresfield (14th cent.), Down Hatherley, Slimbridge (Renaissance). *Hampshire*: Tanglew (Renaissance). *Herefordshire*:

Burghill (probably Norman), Aston Ingham (Renaissance). *Kent*: Brookland, Halstow (Norman), Wychling (probably Early English), Eythorne (Renaissance). *Lincolnshire*: Barnetby-le-Wold (Norman). *Norfolk*: Brundall (probably early English). *Oxfordshire*: Dorchester (Norman), Warborough (13th cent.). *Surrey*: Walton-on-the-Hill (Norman). *Sussex*: Edburton, Pyecombe (early English), Parham (Decorated), Greatham House, Pulborough (date uncertain).

⁴ Internal diameter = 1 ft. 9 in.; internal depth = 12½ in.; external depth = 12¾ in.

⁵ The diameter at top and bottom is nearly the same measurement.

⁶ Height = 8½ in.



HALSTOW, KENT : LEADEN FONT.



HALSTOW : FIGURE OF ANGEL ON FONT.

figures under arches.¹ On nine of these fonts the figures are seated, while at Ashover, Wareham and Halstow they are standing. The figures on this newly-discovered bowl are an angel and a king. The winged angel (plate II) is draped and possesses a nimbus; the king (plate III) is robed, crowned and holds a sceptre in his right hand. If the head of the king had also been nimbed, we might have conjectured that the figure was intended for St. Edmund; but the Norman craftsman has not depicted him pierced with arrows, or holding an arrow or arrows in his hand, nor is the faithful wolf portrayed which guarded his head.² If the artist intended to represent the reigning monarch of his time, then it must have been either king Stephen³ or Henry II, for the bowl was made either in the closing years of the reign of the first-named king or in the early years of his successor. No other leaden bowl exists with an angel and a king, and the Halstow font is, therefore, in no way a replica or variant of any other Norman font of this class.

The semicircular arches containing the figures are repeated in pairs round the bowl; the arches being adorned alternately with a scroll pattern, and a plain band with a row of pellets above and the cable pattern below.⁴ The spandrels are decorated with conventional leaves turned in opposite directions, and the piers are alternately spiral twists with two spiral bands decorated with pellets and vertical grooves. These shafts possess bases and cushioned capitals, while the cable pattern encircles the bottom of the bowl.

Lead-founding was a flourishing industry in England in the twelfth century, and the Halstow bowl is so well preserved that its rich decoration and delicacy of moulding makes it a valuable addition to the lead work we still possess of that period.

All tradition of the existence of an ancient font in the old Saxon church of St. Margaret, Halstow, has long ago

¹ Frampton-on-Severn, Lancut, Oxenhall, Sandhurst, Siston, Tidenham (Gloucestershire), Ashover (Derbyshire), Wareham (Dorset), Burghill (of Burghill all is restoration except the top of the arcade) (Herefordshire), Dorchester (Oxfordshire), Walton-on-the-Hill (Surrey) all

possess large arcades containing figures under arches.

² The figure of St. Edmund in Henry the Seventh's chapel, Westminster, has no emblem or arrow or wolf.

³ King Stephen died in 1154.

⁴ The thickness of the lead is about $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

disappeared, and the exact date when the rectangular encasement of plaster was constructed will probably remain a mystery. The enemy to leaden fonts has ever been the intrinsic value of the material, and Edward VI's visitors who purged the parish churches at the abolition of the chantries knew well the value of lead and would gladly remove a richly-decorated font if it could be brought under their inventories of superstitious objects. However, the visitors appointed by the earl of Manchester in 1643 to destroy and demolish altars, candlesticks, pictures and images in churches found sufficient plea to remove or mutilate a work of art even if it possessed the figure of an angel. For example, we read in William Dowsing's *Diary*¹ that he visited Southwold in 1643, and he wrote thus :—

'We brake down one hundred and thirty superstitious pictures, St. Andrew, and four crosses on the four corners of the vestry; and gave orders to take down thirteen cherubims, and to take down twenty angels, and to take down the cover of the font.'

Seeing this iconoclast was determined to remove the angels as well as the cherubims, it is, therefore, not unlikely that the parishioners of Halstow considered the easiest method of preserving their font was to encase it in a mass of plaster, so as to hide the beautiful nimbed angels. This too, was the date when preparations were being made for the Civil War, and the prudent churchwardens may also have desired to hide a font which could so easily have been converted into bullets.

We offer our warm thanks to Mr. George C. Druce, F.S.A. for allowing his beautiful photographs of this most interesting font to illustrate our paper. Mr. Druce's photographs were taken after the font had been restored, and it will be seen that there are certain letters near the heads of some of the figures. These are repeated and are apparently due to the mould, but, unfortunately, only one or two are distinct and the whole cannot be deciphered. Above four of the angels the letters E N and probably I can be seen and there are some letters over the head of one of the kings, which are difficult to make out.

¹ William Dowsing was appointed by the earl of Manchester as 'visitor of the Suffolk churches,' December 1643, and his *Diary*

gives interesting particulars of the way he carried out this mission.



HALSTOW: FIGURE OF KING ON FONT.