

Derbyshire Fonts.

By G. LE BLANC SMITH.



BEFORE continuing this series of short notices of our county's fonts, I should like to state that there should be two additions to the lists of fonts, given under the head of that at Youlgreave, in the last volume of this *Journal*. To the list of fonts having projections add Sutton Bonington, Leicestershire (St. Michael's Church); to the list of fonts carved with the salamander add Luxulyan, Cornwall.

The example at Sutton Bonington has three projections—one for the missal-stand, the second for the taper, and the third for the salt; at least, these are the uses assigned to them nowadays. For this information I am indebted to the Rev. H. Eardley Field, of Ambergate.

The font at Luxulyan, Cornwall, has the salamander like that at St. Austell, in the same county, of which it is practically a facsimile.

FONT AT SOMERSALL HERBERT.

This example is of the tub or vat-shaped variety, which in itself might be taken as proof of its early date, but such is not the case. Though the earliest form of Norman font was of this shape, the example under notice is to be dated as fairly late in the style, viz., *circa* 1150. The chief ornament is the interlaced arcade, while other decorations are the curious link pattern round the top and the circles therein interwoven.

The workmanship of the link pattern is of a fairly good character, but the arcading is of a very slovenly type both

in execution and in the manner in which it was "set out." This form of arcade, *i.e.*, the interlaced, is a common feature in late Norman work, being but occasionally used in the middle Norman and never in early work of this style. Many people point to the undoubtedly early specimen of a tub-shaped font



Fig. 1.—Font at Somersall Herbert.*

at St. Martin's, Canterbury, as clear proof that the arcade, and an interlaced arcade too, was in use soon after the Conquest. This is, of course, easy of explanation, as it consists of thirty-five separate stones, having been built in pre-Norman times, and later it was cut with the ornaments it now bears.

* The illustrations to this paper are reproduced from photographs by the author.—EDITOR.

In the case of Somersall Herbert the piers of the arcade are of proportionately enormous width, which quite ruins the general effect. The capitals, also, are much too heavy, while the bases, to all intents and purposes, are practically non-existent. The arches are of a light order and nicely cut. The interlacing arcade was no doubt the origin of the lancet windows of Early English times. Arcading was often used on the towers of churches, and, most probably, at some time an enterprising Norman mason cut the stone out from one of these pointed arches, and thus created the first pointed headed window.

The band of ornament running round the top of the font is best explained by references to the illustration, fig. 1. It consists of a series of attached squares set on their points, round each alternate junction of squares being a circular ring of moulding. An exactly similar ornament is cut on a Norman lintel stone at St. Bees. There is no doubt that this font is not placed as it should be, as below the arcade is a flat moulded band under which is a groove. The stone below the groove is rough and unfinished, hence doubtless, the font was originally inserted in a base stone up to the groove.* This should again be done, as at present the general effect is spoiled, for if this part is covered over in the illustration the improvement in the effect is marked. The untooled portion is $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep. The dimensions are:—

Total height	-	-	2 ft. 6 in. (including $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. of untooled stone).
Width across top	-	2	„ 9 „
„ of interior	-	1	„ 9 „ to 1 ft. $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. near bottom.
Depth of „	-	1	„ 0 „

It has both drain and lead lining, which last seems to be original.

* I believe I am justified in saying that this also represents the views of the Rev. Reginald Fitz-Herbert, the Rector of the parish.

Other fonts ornamented with the arcade are Ockbrook and Bradbourne—both of which are much damaged—Hognaston, Pentrich, and

KIRK HALLAM.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about this font, save the curious little medallions at the foot at each compart-



Fig. 2.—Font at Kirk Hallam.

ment formed by the interlacing arcade, which is *the* feature of the scheme of ornament chosen by the Norman artist.

The whole thing forms a very striking contrast to the last font noticed. Here the carving is shallow, cleanly cut, well “set out” or planned, and the arches and supporting piers are

thin but well proportioned, giving an air of lightness and neatness quite foreign to Norman work of the usual stamp. Here, again, the tub-shaped font has been the artist's choice, but subsequently the craftsmen of Early English times chose to embellish it with a pedestal of their own design. This has not in the least spoiled the general effect; in fact, in my humble opinion, it has greatly added to the richness of it. It is, perhaps, a trifle top-heavy, but this little irregularity rather attracts attention, and enhances the appearance of the closely cut rings on the upper part of the bare stone.

The arcading is of the interlaced type, but it appears as though, at some time, the surface had been what is technically known as "scraped," or, in other words, the outer shell of discoloured stone has been lightly chiselled over. I have presumed that the arcade interlaces because it is so seldom otherwise, though at times one arcading is laid over another, the centre of one arch being directly over the springing of two other arches from the supporting pier. The capitals of the columns are very curious, and can hardly be recognised as such. There are no bases, but at the bottom of each panel, flanked by each pair of piers, is a little medallion containing a fleur-de-lys, which has a very decided "droop" to the outer leaves. This exactly resembles the fleur, of which there are a large number, on the magnificent specimen at Lenton, Nottingham. The same pattern of fleur occurs on the leaden font at Ashover, in this county (Derbyshire), as we shall see later.

The measurements are as follows:—

	ft.	in.
Height of Norman portion - - -	1	11
Total height - - - - -	4	3
Width of top of bowl - - - -	2	2½
Width of interior of bowl - - -	1	8½
Depth of interior of bowl - - -		10

It has a drain, but no lead lining.

CHURCH BROUGHTON.

This is a most interesting font, decorated in a very unusual manner; I have never seen or heard of any like it. The ornament is certainly neither elaborate nor well cut, and consists of interlaced circles and triangles.



Fig. 3.—Font at Church Broughton.

These are doubtless intended to illustrate Eternity and the Holy Trinity respectively. The triangles are hardly worthy of the name, as their geometrical form is in most cases sadly wanting. It seems as though the carver had lost the "thread" of his design, and had joined up the lines in any way he could. A feature of the eastern side is the long shafted cross

patee, evidently adapted from the processional cross of those times, and closely resembling that on the pre-Conquest incised sepulchral slab at Alvaston, near Derby. The absence of similarly designed fonts naturally prohibits comparisons between this specimen and others. The carving is not so rude as it is irregular, for the straight lines are more or less straight, and the circles are fairly round, but the general design is as slovenly as it is shallow. This design stands away but very little from the surface of the bowl, though the material seems to be a soft stone, and therefore easy to cut deeply.

The measurements are as follows:—

	ft.	in.
Height - - - - -	1	11
Width at top - - - -	2	4
Interior width - - - -	1	11
Interior depth - - - -	1	1

CHESTERFIELD.

The font here is one of those curious examples of conflicting evidence of styles, which some of the art workers of early mediæval times seem to have delighted in concocting, to the bewilderment and annoyance of the unfortunate archæologist who seeks to class them individually, and to ascribe a precise date for their origin. To add to other points of difficulty, the stone of which this font is constructed is slightly mottled, and in a very dilapidated state, all owing to the old, old story of "The Vicarage garden flower-pot." Such was the use to which this venerable relic was condemned till some fifteen years ago, when it found shelter again in the church. It stands in the centre of the south transept, a dark place, and would have been much more accessible if placed in the correct situation at the west end of the nave.

The only decipherable parts of it, as now placed, are the south-east and south-west sides. One thing is quite certain, *i.e.*, the font as it now remains is far from being complete. I believe a foot at least is missing from the top; it was no

doubt at one time a tub-shaped font intended to stand on its own base, and never had a supporting pillar to it, certainly not one such as it now has. In fig. 4, on the left, may be seen a knot-work pattern at the base and a foliated cross above, within a circle. Immediately on the right of these is a roughly cut Norman pillar with square capital, spirally ornamented, and a rough square base. On the capital rests the lower part of what was once the spring of two arches of

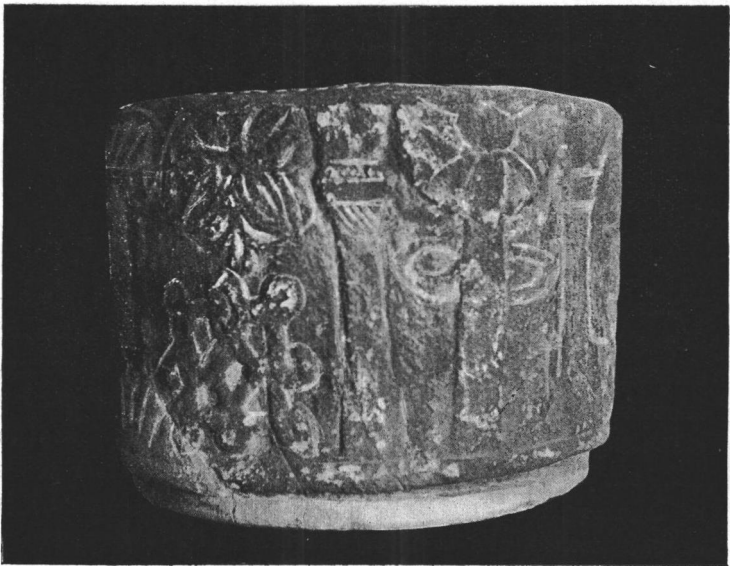


Fig. 4.—Font at Chesterfield, South West Side.

a Norman arcade. This is my reason for considering that part of the top is missing.

On the right of this pillar, or pier, is a long shafted cross with a round head, or, rather, a circular glory, upon which may just be discerned the remains of a cross *patee* with the edges of the arms curved. The upper part of this is also missing. When complete, it would somewhat resemble the usual type of Cornish cross heads.

The south-east side, as seen in fig. 5, shows another small piece of ornament. At the base are intertwined boughs, springing, as they ascend, into very conventional but not altogether common leaf forms. On the right of the same illustration, dim traces of a somewhat similar pattern are to be found. This font is so deeply weatherworn that the detail is hardly visible to the naked eye; in fact, the only way in which it was possible to obtain photographs showing the



Fig. 5.—Font at Chesterfield, South-East Side.

design, was to light it strongly from one side only, by burning magnesium wire (used by kind permission of the Vicar, the Rev. Canon Hacking), thus showing up any projections by casting a strong shadow from them. This must be my excuse for the poor quality of the illustrations.

The font is of a black stone, with lead lining and drain, and is of the following dimensions:—

	ft.	in.
Height of bowl only - - - -	2	0
External width of bowl only - -	2	6
Internal " " " - - -	1	11
Depth " " " - - -		10

Here we have a cord pattern used in pre-Norman times (and in Norman also to a small extent) combined with a floriated cross which might be Early English and foliage of a late Norman style. If we call this font Middle Norman, and date it as about 1100, it is as early as it would be safe to deduce.

ASHOVER.



Fig. 6.—Leaden Font at Ashover.

This splendid example of the metal work of the Norman period is second only in importance to the font at Youlgreave. When the wealth of lead which Derbyshire possesses is taken into consideration, it is most remarkable that this should be the only specimen of a font constructed of that material. Of course, a leaden font was always an object worthy of plunder, and there may have been others which found their way into the melting-pot. There is a large number of leaden fonts in the kingdom, and the similarity of design in a great many

of them, though situated at considerable distances from one another, is most noticeable. The font in question stands at the west end of the nave, and is provided with a drain. The base stone and shaft are modern.

The scheme of ornament is that of an arcade of twenty arches, forming a series of canopies over a similar number of male figures clothed in long robes. In every case their right hands are pressed to their hearts, while the left hands hold a book.

Both capitals and bases of the piers, which support the arcade arches, are characteristic. In some cases—in fact, in the majority—the inner edge of each arch has the remains of a cable pattern along it, while in one or two cases there appear to be remains of a little piece of foliage at the springing point of the arcade arches. Below the feet of the figures is a beautiful band of fleurs-de-lys of a character best described by the illustration. The height is 1 ft. 2 in., while it varies in diameter from 1 ft. 11 in. to 2 ft.

The following is a list of leaden fonts in England, though by no means all are of Norman date.

LEADEN FONTS.

<i>Place.</i>		<i>County.</i>
Childrey	- - - -	Berkshire.
Clewer	- - - -	Do.
Long Wittenham	- - - -	Do.
Woolstone	- - - -	Do.
Ashover	- - - -	Derbyshire.
Wareham	- - - -	Dorsetshire.
Frampton-on-Severn	- - - -	Gloucestershire.
Lancaut*	- - - -	Do.
Oxenhall	- - - -	Do.
Sandhurst	- - - -	Do.
Siston	- - - -	Do.
Slimbridge	- - - -	Do.
Tidenham	- - - -	Do.

* Now at Stroud, in Sir Wm. Marling's Park.

Aston Ingham	-	-	-	Herefordshire.
Burghill	-	-	-	Do.
Brookland	-	-	-	Kent.
Chilham	-	-	-	Do.
Eythorne	-	-	-	Do.
Romney	-	-	-	Do.
Wychling	-	-	-	Do.
Barnetby-le-Wold	-	-	-	Lincolnshire.
Brundal	-	-	-	Norfolk.
Great Plumstead	-	-	-	Do.
Hasingham	-	-	-	Do.
Clifton	-	-	-	Oxfordshire.
Dorchester	-	-	-	Do.
Warborough	-	-	-	Do.
Pitcombe	-	-	-	Somerset.
Walton-on-the-Hill	-	-	-	Surrey.
Edburton	-	-	-	Sussex.
Parham	-	-	-	Do.
Pilcombe	-	-	-	Do.
Churton	-	-	-	Wiltshire.

That at Long Wittenham, Berks., is illustrated in the *Archæological Journal*, Vol. II., p. 135; while Vol. VI., p. 160, of the same *Journal* has an able and well illustrated account of that at Brookland, Kent. Paley, in his *Baptismal Fonts*, illustrates the example at Warborough, Oxford.

The last-named, together with those of Dorchester and Long Wittenham, are all much alike, and bear a resemblance to the example under notice in possessing a row of canopied figures round the bowl.

The font at Walton-on-the-Hill is well illustrated in *The Reliquary*, Vol. III., p. 235, and also has figures, though seated, under an arcade.

HADDON HALL.

This font is worthy of illustration on account of its typical Norman shape and its symmetrical design. It is of small dimensions, and stands in the chapel to the west of one of

the piers of the south arcade. It is much chipped and worn, but well illustrates the ancient foundation of the Haddon chapel, as does the Norman pier against which it stands. "Simplicity" seems to be the keynote of the design. It is rather strange that, in light of present day example, a simple font such as this should have been retained in so magnificent a mansion as Haddon was.



Fig. 7.—Font in Haddon Hall Chapel.

WIRKSWORTH.

This font is far the older of the two which the church at Wirksworth possesses, and was carefully restored in 1896, in memory of the Rev. T. Tunstall Smith, once Vicar of the parish. This restoration is one of the most thoroughly successful of its kind that I have ever come across, as the massiveness of the bowl and the general "squat" appearance have in no way been detracted from, the bases of the side shafts greatly aiding the general effect. It is of huge proportions, and there

should have been no difficulty in baptism by immersion here, for in many Norman fonts the bowl is so extremely small that it is a marvel how the child was ever immersed.

The shape of the bowl is like a gipsy's pot or kettle, and at the base are four projecting shoulders resting on the heads



Fig. 8.—Font at Wirksworth.

of the detached angle shafts. The ring round the top is much chipped and broken. The font now stands in the centre of the north transept of Wirksworth's beautiful cruciform church, and is provided with a drain and the almost general lead lining.

There are several other Norman fonts which merit brief mention, but are not worth illustrating.

PENTRICH.

Bell-shaped bowl, with shallow round arcade; cut with date 1662, no doubt the year in which it was restored to the church. The base is modern and ugly.

HOGNASTON.

A neat round font; very shallow, well cut with arcade. Now mounted on a thin pedestal of three engaged shafts, in which it looks anything but dignified.

BRADBOURNE.

A good type of font, of which only the bowl remains; cut with usual arcade.

OCKBROOK.

A specimen somewhat resembling that at Somersall Herbert.

DARLEY DALE.

A fairly plain specimen with peculiar depressions in the bowl. Was for many years lost to the church, but finally recovered.*

STAVELEY.

A peculiar late Norman font. Has a circular bowl at top, which is, lower down, chamfered to form a square; supported on four tiny angle shafts and large central one. On one corner of base of bowl is carved a king's head or, at any rate, a crowned head.

The following is, I believe, a complete list of the Norman fonts which now remain to guide the archæologist in ascertaining the approximate date of the foundation of many of our Derbyshire churches.

* See page 34 of this volume.—EDITOR.

LIST OF NORMAN FONTS IN DERBYSHIRE.

<i>Place.</i>	<i>Approximate date.</i>
Tissington - - - - -	1066 to 1100.
Mellor - - - - -	" "
Thorpe - - - - -	" "
Brassington - - - - -	1100.
Marston-on-Dove - - - - -	"
Longford - - - - -	"
Eyam - - - - -	"
Chesterfield - - - - -	"
Haddon Hall - - - - -	"
Bradbourne - - - - -	1100 to 1150.
Hognaston - - - - -	" "
Ockbrook - - - - -	" "
Pentrich - - - - -	" "
Kirk Hallam - - - - -	" "
Darley Dale - - - - -	" "
Crich - - - - -	" "
Wirksworth - - - - -	1150 to 1200.
Parwich - - - - -	" "
Somersall Herbert - - - - -	" "
Church Broughton - - - - -	" "
Staveley - - - - -	" "
Youlgreave - - - - -	" "
Ashover - - - - -	1200.
Pleasley - - - - -	"

The rude and unornamental fonts of both North and South Wingfield can hardly be assigned to any specified date, as there is nothing to guide us.

The specimen at Bolsover was destroyed when the church was burnt down.

DERBYSHIRE FONTS.

Now that this series of notes on the Norman fonts of Derbyshire is concluded, a few comments may not be out of place. There are but two really fine and very interesting

examples, namely, those of Youlgreave and Ashover. Our county is but poorly supplied with specimens of great archæological interest, and this is very much more noticeable when one visits Cornwall, and sees the splendid, richly ornamented and shaped fonts which abound there. The few specimens which *do* exist in Derbyshire have not been by any means well treated. That at Taddington reposes in an inn, where it has been for far too many years. The font at Thorpe was exposed to the weather till the sculpture had all peeled off under the destroying influence of our decidedly changeable climate. The example at Crich has been "scraped" and "restored" out of all likeness to an ancient font; while that at Ockbrook has had a large cavity hewn in its sides, and now lies beneath the tower. The Bradbourne example is now safely housed beneath the tower of the church, after lying neglected and uncared for in the grounds of the Hall, adjoining the churchyard, for which ill treatment it is none the better. The font at North Wingfield has been rescued from the degrading position in which Dr. Cox found it, *i.e.*, a washing basin for the school children. Youlgreave, as we have seen, has had a very lucky escape from decay, if not from total demolition, as has also the font at Tissington. The one at Mellor would be none the worse for a little attention, particularly the removal of the green old tap, which now forms such an unsightly projection on one side. That at Hognaston is made to look ridiculous by being perched on the top of a slender column of three engaged shafts. A very curious point about all these fonts is the absolute and entire absence of the commonest ornaments of Norman art. There are no examples of the chevron, billet, roller, star, or filleting on any of the fonts I have described. Among ornaments of a minor character which do appear the cable is not infrequent, while among the larger type of designs the arcade is not uncommon. The earlier types of fonts, as Tissington and Mellor, are extremely good of their kind, but the later examples show, on the whole, a sad falling off in interest.

Of the art of the short period of Transition, from late Norman times to the days in which the Early English style had fully asserted the power, there are but two specimens of fonts. These are at Winster and Fenny Bentley. The true Early English has admirable examples in Ashbourne, Norbury, Bradley, Kniveton, Deveridge, and especially in Norton, near Sheffield. I hope to describe and illustrate these in the *Journal* of next year, afterwards passing on to those of the Decorated and Perpendicular periods.

NOTE.—Somersall Herbert. The Rev. R. FitzHerbert kindly reminds me that in the band of ornament round the top of this font there is a space of about two feet six inches, in which four of the rings I have described are omitted.