Derbyshire Fonts.

By G. Le Blanc Smith.

DECORATED PERIOD.

THE period of Ecclesiastical architecture which is usually known by the very broad name of " Decorated " has no very numerous examples of fonts in Derbyshire.

It is a curious fact that this Decorated style, which perhaps owns more beautiful examples of churches than any other style of English architecture, should be the only style in which design, as applied to the Baptismal Font, is so lacking in feature or grace, and in which the workmanship is so rough and so badly executed as to shame, almost, the early Norman sculptor. Yet such is the case; poor quality of design, coupled with workmanship of an even worse quality, are the almost invariable characteristics of this period.

The Decorated style followed the Early English style, examples of whose fonts were given in the *Journal* of last year. The latter was the first to use the pointed window, and in the Decorated style we see this pointed window undergoing a process of evolution, resolving into one with a pointed head, but filled with other pointed windows, *i.e.*, tracery.

The principal fonts of this Decorated period which yet remain in Derbyshire are at Bradbourne, Bakewell, Ballidon, Chaddesden, Hartington, Monyash, Sandiacre.

Of these, the earliest is undoubtedly that at Bradbourne; the others are hard to place in order of date, and may be well taken in alphabetical sequence.

This font stands at the West end of .the church, on a large block of stone. The most remarkable point about it is its

Fig. 1.—Bradbourne.

size. Height, 1 ft. 10 in.; width, 2 ft. 3 in.; diam. of bowl, 1 ft. 9 in.; depth of bowl, 11 in.

Paley illustrates it and describes it as Early English; I very much doubt if this is so, and feel confident that the Decorated period may legitimately claim it. The shape is one which no

Early English sculptor would use, *i.e.*, a square, for delicacy and lightness are predominant features in that style, and this great clumsy block of stone can lay claim to neither of these necessary attributes. Then, again, the weakly cut design (a feature of Decorated work, as we have seen), and the very nature of the design itself, is redolent of the early days of the Decorated style, which succeeded the days of plate-tracery.

Fig. 2.—Bakewell (faces 8, 1, 2, 3).

Here is the geometrical tracery with which the early days of Decorated architecture opened, *i.e.*, a quatrefoil.

What may partly have influenced Paley is the curious likeness to a font in Leicestershire, at Twyford; here is a somewhat similar design on a square font (now supported on legs), and this font has the dog-tooth ornament on its angles. This dog-tooth lends a suspicion that the font is the work of Early English carvers; this is most probable, but we find the font of the

neighbouring village of Thorpe Arnold (vide *The Reliquary*, vol. ix.) with the same ornament on it, also a characteristic bit of Norman symbolical carving.

Thus the Twyford (Leicestershire) font is very early in the Early English style, but this example at Bradbourne has the design more fully developed—from an arrangement of fleur-headed crosses *patées* in a circle—into what may be called tracery.

BAKEWELL.

As Fig. 2 shows the angles of this font are chamfered and the sides are all ornamented with designs, as on the two shown. This font must not be confused with the other font at Bradbourne; this other font is Norman, and lies beneath the tower, rescued from the gardens of the hall.

This font is one of those rude specimens which have already been mentioned, and is, as a rule, pointed out, with much reverence, to the casual visitor to Bakewell Church *as Saxon!*

How many people depart annually from Bakewell with this curious and misleading piece of information instilled into their minds it would be hard to imagine, as even some of the guide books have not yet had this startling fact " edited " from their pages.

The three photographs of this really very interesting font show all the eight sides.

Each face of the octagon is roughly, indeed badly, carved with saintly figures under unorthodox canopies, formed by the interlacement of natural foliage (at least it is supposed to represent nature), with cuspings beneath the boughs.

Taking Dr. Cox's interpretation of the figures shown, we first light upon the very evident figure of St. Peter, with his customary symbols of church and key. The fact that the wards of the key are as bulky as the whole church was but a small, and quite unimportant, detail to this slovenly sculptor.

Facing him is St. Paul, with naked sword and open book. On the *right* of Fig. 2 (face 3, shown in Fig. 3) is a figure wearing a crown, and holding, in his right hand, a branch with a big bird sitting on it, and in his left what appears to be a musical instrument like a harp.

This personage is considered by Dr. Cox to be either King David or Edward the Confessor. The emblem of the former

Fig. 3.—Bakewell (faces 2, 3, 4, 5).

is either a figure playing on the harp or else a figure bearing the head of Goliath in his hand.

King Edward the Confessor is represented either as a crowned figure carrying St. John's Gospel, or else with a sceptre in his hands, though more often he bestows a ring upon St. John the Evangelist, who is dressed as a pilgrim.

Face 4, fig. 3, shows a figure seated in the attitude in which saints are usually portrayed in Anglo-Saxon art; in fact, this

resemblance is so striking that it may well have created the idea that the font was Saxon. This figure is nimbed, and raises both hands in blessing, and is considered by Dr. Cox to represent St. Augustine. This saint is often represented by his emblem of a heart, as one of the four doctors of the Church ; sometimes as a bishop, before whom stands a child, nimbed, and with a spoon in its hand.

Face 5, Figs. 3 and 4, represents a figure with a scroll, which might be any saint, and, in the case of face 6, St. John the Baptist.

Face 7, Fig. 4, might represent any saint in the Calendar, and Dr. Cox considers face 8 (fig. 4) to be carved with a representation of St. Chad. It shows an undoubted bishop.

Mr. Rawlin's interpretation of these designs—read in the same order as the foregoing—seem rather wild ; they are : 1 Abraham, 2 St. Peter, 3 Noah, 4 St. John, 5 St. Paul, 6 David, 7 Christ before Pilate, or Paul before Agrippa, 8 Pope, with triple crown.

BALLIDON.

This font is a curiosity, in fact one might almost term it a freak. It is, however, another of the many examples of the careless and little premeditated work of the designer's drawings, in the Decorated period of English church architecture.

The shape is one which originated, in a really graceful form, with the designers of Decorated times, and found much favour in the eyes of ecclesiastical architects for a very considerable period afterwards, lasting even into the debased and miserable style—if " style " it can be called—which succeeded the Reformation.

This design is chalice-shaped, and should therefore be an especially favourite one for the subject, as we thus get the two Sacraments of the Anglican Church symbolized by utensils of one shape.

In executing the finer carved work on this font, the sculptor evidently found it more convenient to work with the stone

reversed, perhaps to secure extra stability for his work. At any rate, whatever his object may have been, he has carved much of this font with designs upside down.

In Fig. 5, which shows the south side, we see in the upper row an inverted uncharged shield on the left; then, working round to the north side, are a blank panel, a panel filled with a mass of foliage and—not shown in Fig. 5—a human head and
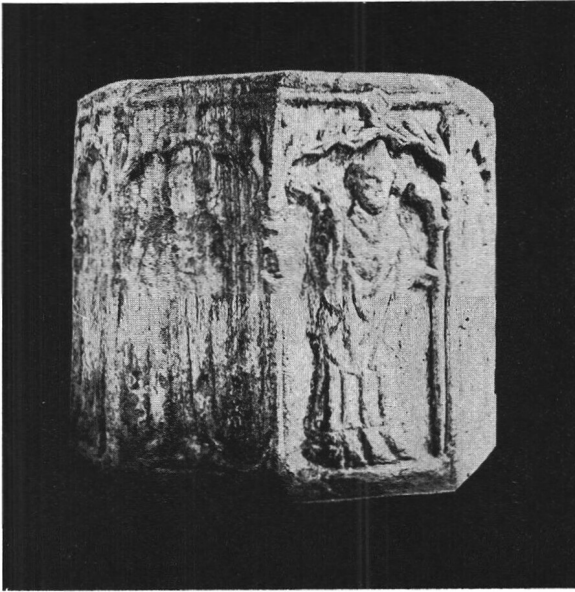

Fig. 4.—Bakewell (faces 5, 6, 7, 8).

shoulders, the person depicted points with his right arm to an open book on the other side of the panel; then follow another uncharged shield and a three-light piece of Decorated period tracery. All this row is upside down like that beneath, which contains foliage, of a kind, all the way round, save under the uncharged shield, which is on the reverse side to that shown in the photo; here is a square panel, which contains sixteen

like pellets, arranged in lines of four. The third row, count-
ing downwards from the top, is also filled with inverted foliage,
of a nondescript and undescribable character.

Beneath this third row is a break in the stone of which the
font is constructed; thus the complete font consists of two parts,
the bowl and half the stem, which are carved upside down, and

Fig. 5.—Ballidon.

in the other part, the other half of the stem and the foot of
the pedestal, which are carved right way up.

As shown in Fig. 5, on the left, the first panel is blank, the
second contains some *square leaved* foliage, the third likewise,
while the fourth has an object resembling a very attenuated

pear as much as anything, while No. 5 panel is blank, being followed by another of the curious designs as in the fourth panel.

The ornament on the foot consists of shields and what seems to be intended to represent bunches of grapes.

Fig. 6.—Chaddesden.

This font is 3 ft. 1 in. high and 2 ft. 6 in. wide. The church or rather chapel, is very tiny, and was once adorned with some curious frescoes, or perhaps wall paintings is a better term.

These a sapient churchwarden—of the period when our Church was in her darkest mood in the eighteenth century—

removed, owing to the fact that he considered their presence caused the church " to look like a bad place," to use his own words.

CHADDESDEN.

Here again we get another font which is something of a freak, not only in general appearance, but in its method of construction and design.

In shape it is heptagonal, being, I believe, one of the only four specimens known to be constructed on this peculiar plan. As far as shape was concerned, the favourite plan was that of an octagon, while the square, from which sprang the octagon, by chamfering off the corners, and the round planned bowls, were also firm, but earlier, favourites among constructors of mediæval fonts.

The general design is as nondescript as it is peculiar, and in addition to the foregoing peculiarities it is constructed of no less than three separate stones.

From mere appearance it seems as though the bowl of the present font was orginally the upper portion of a larger font, which, so far from being perched on a very crazy-looking pedestal, was continued downwards from its present base, having the appearance of a heptagonal tub or vat, and consisting of one block of stone to the base.

The present broken and rough-looking upper portion of the bowl was no doubt once a highly decorated projecting cornice.

The bowl, as it now is, is ornamented with trefoil-headed tracery, such as was often used in the earlier examples of Decorated style windows; the lower part of the stem or pedestal is, I fancy—relying on memory—an octagon; while the little stone between the latter and the bowl is square in plan.

The pedestal is rather of the shape of the later style of ecclesiastical architecture, the Perpendicular, so that this font is perhaps constructed of three distinctly different fonts, or at any rate of two.

There is really nothing more to remark with regard to this font, save that it is a matter for serious wonderment how it ever came to be preserved at all during the ages in which anything with the taint of antiquity about it, anything not severely plain and puritanical, was consigned by those in charge of our Parish Churches to either the churchyard, or secular or horticultural purposes, should it, by any curious chance, avoid being smashed up.

Fig. 7.—Hartington.

Then, on the other hand, the apparent mutilation of the original bowl may have been accomplished by these very church-wreckers, and these fragments that remain pieced together and patched up by a more scrupulous and more sane-minded generation.

HARTINGTON.

The font in the border village of Hartington is another of these traceried examples of the Decorated style, but is more

carefully executed. When last I saw this font, some six years ago, it still was bedaubed with colours, which were once considered to be the height of beauty in church furniture; pillars, fonts, woodwork, monuments, etc., alike being either painted with all the varied hues of the rainbow, or choked up with successive coats of limewash. The use of whitewash still continues, unfortunately, in the south-west of this country, many fine old Devonshire churches being liberally plastered with it, to their utter ruin, in so far as appearances are concerned.

MONYASH.

This font is probably well advanced in the period known as Decorated, but seems to possess more characteristics of this style than the succeeding one, termed Perpendicular. The chief points about it are the coat of arms, within a shield, on the south side of the octagonal bowl, and the curious animal whose head projects from beneath the projecting bowl on the east side.

The stem consists of five clustered shafts—a large central one and four small side shafts. This arrangement would be rare, if not unique, in a font of the Perpendicular style, and inclines one to the belief that it was constructed in the earlier period.

The coat of arms is that of Bovill,[1] the armorial bearings being a *fess* between *three saltires engrailed*.

The curious semi-human, semi-bestial face which has been mentioned, has a counterpart in the angle corbel in the tower of Darley Dale Church. On the North-east and South-east pillars of the clustered shafts, which form the stem of the font, are the creature's forepaws and legs, while the hind legs project from the North and South sides of the stem.

The enormously heavy and ponderous-looking base should be noticed.

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[1] Though not the proper armorial bearings of this family, they were thus borne by Bishop Bovill. Their presence here is perhaps owing to the marriage of Rich. Blackwell with the Bovill heiress.

SANDIACRE.

This font, of which but brief mention is necessary, is a very fair, but unusual, example of the Decorated period. It is octagonal and of a chalice shape, though somewhat too compressed. The panels round the bowl are carved with various
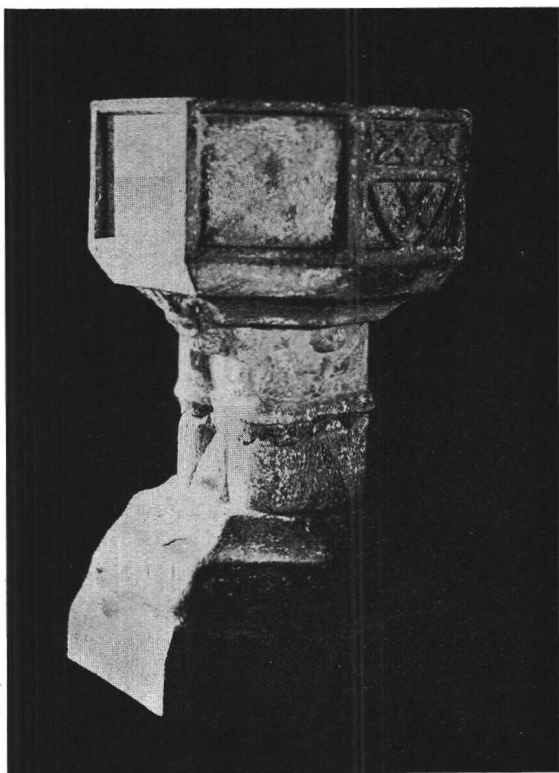

Fig. 8.—Monyash.

square-edged leaf forms. The mouldings round the lower portion of the bowl, the stem, and upper part of the foot, are bold, good and rich in style.

The fonts already dealt with in the last few volumes of the *Journal* have now shown the various phases of ornament and

design for no less than three separate architectural periods—
Norman, Early English, and Decorated; or, as some people
prefer it, Norman, First Pointed, and Middle Pointed.

Next year I hope to deal with several more or less interesting
fonts of the Perpendicular, or Third Pointed, style. These
are not numerous, however, and the gradual decline of richness
in ornament, and poverty of thought in design, will be still more
noticeable than in the last two periods which have been dealt
with.