



F O N T *

In * Gattrees * Church * Norfolk *

G.

Anastatic Press

FIGURE AND DESCRIPTION
OF
THE FONT AT TOFTREES,

THE LATTER WRITTEN BY A MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY
RESIDENT NEAR THE SPOT.

COMMUNICATED BY
THE REV. W. J. STRACEY.

THE font here represented may justly be numbered among our best Norfolk specimens for richness and variety of design, and, considering the period, for careful execution; and it may consequently be regarded as peculiarly deserving the attention of a provincial Archæological Society. The ornaments wrought upon its sides appear to leave no doubt of the propriety of referring it to the Norman æra, of which our county affords numerous and very curious specimens; but none that I am acquainted with at all similar to this. Those at Sherbourn and Castle Rising approach it most nearly; but with them the resemblance is only general, and indeed is mainly confined to the cord that encircles the upper part of the basin. Nor does the *Archæologia*, which contains numerous examples of fonts from different parts of the kingdom, or Lysons' *Britannia*, or even Mr. Paley's extensive work on the subject, stand us in better stead. The last-mentioned publication exhibits no fewer than forty specimens which the author regards as Norman; but not one of them closely approaches this at Toftrees. Those at Stoke Cannon in Devonshire and Palgrave in Suffolk perhaps do so more than any other; but even they very little, and still

less than the two I have referred to in Norfolk. And here I must be allowed to say, that a most acceptable service would be rendered to Norfolk archæology by any one of our Members who would take a general view of the fonts in the county, and arrange them in distinct classes. The architecture and the arts of Norfolk would owe him great obligations.

To turn, however, to the object before us:—the following description was made from actual observation of the original.

It is a square Norman basin, supported by five columns resting on a square plinth. This latter is again elevated on a separate and independent base, which assumes towards the west the form of a kneeling-stone, but has been apparently put together with rough and unshapen fragments, at some later period. Each side of the basin measures 2 ft. 3 in. horizontally, and 1 ft. 7 in. perpendicularly. The capitals employed in the work may be described as highly finished specimens of the "cushion" capital, varying from each other in design, but all of tasteful composition. Thus, also, the four panels are distinguished by a "concordia discors." Three of them are examples of the rich Norman knot, formed by a triple band of members running parallel throughout their various intricacies, and producing a breadth of effect, which must be studied in the original to be appreciated. The fourth is enriched by a star of six rays, interlaced alternately with three concentric circles. The angles at each upper corner terminate in the head of a lion, bridled by the triple cord which is continued round the rim of the basin, breaking off at intervals into an occasional foliation. One of the original staples still remains. The drain appears to have been carried down the north-western column of support, over which (and not in the centre) the leaden lining is pierced. This drain was also carried upwards through the lion's head, to enable a straight rod to be passed downwards in case of obstruction.

The font is in its proper position; but the church, except in the simplicity of its ground-plan, presents no reminiscence of the Norman æra. It has no traces of aisles; and its windows are mostly early English. One curious feature is the priest's doorway of the chancel, which is barely one foot and three-quarters in width. It is splayed on its eastern jamb, so as to command the centre of the Communion-table. Here a question naturally arises: Did this door ever do the office of a window? Or, was it so splayed, to enable the priest, before entering the Sanctuary, to utter a short prayer, on the first view of the Mysteries?

The inner portion of the east end has been cut away at some period, with a view probably to a reredos; and at the west end of the interior the side walls have been also pared, with a regularity of design, of which the intention is not so apparent.

The tower at the west end has angular buttresses, but is dilapidated nearly down to the roof-ridge.

A flat sepulchral stone, covered by a pew, shows part of an incised cross, with the words, ICI PASSE * * * PVR LAME THOMAS. * * * The rest is concealed from view.

This parish gives its name to a Deanry.

