

Font Cover,

FORMERLY IN

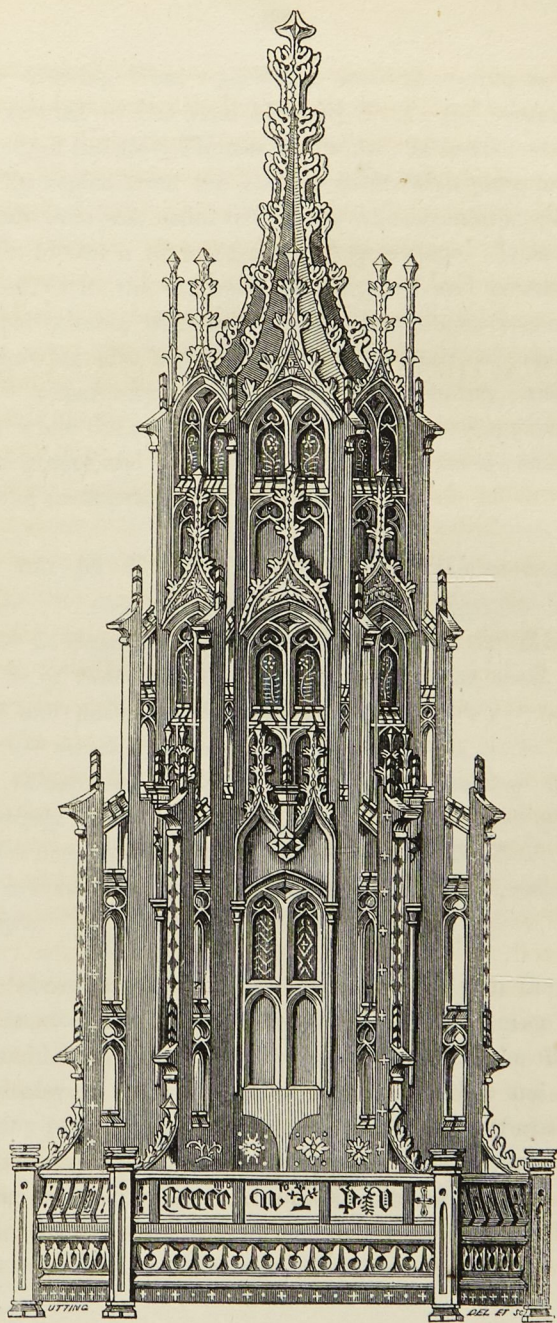
RANWORTH CHURCH, NORFOLK.

COMMUNICATED BY

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THE Church of Ranworth is well known to many members of our Society, on account of the rich remains of ancient wood-carving still preserved in it. Its magnificent Screen, adorned with painting and gilding, is celebrated as one of the best examples of that branch of art in the county. Notwithstanding, however, the great amount of decoration it still exhibits in its internal fittings, &c., there is no doubt that in past times its treasures were yet more abundant; and that it has by no means escaped either the spoliation of mistaken zeal, or the slower decay of age. To preserve the remains of antiquity from oblivion is one part of our Society's office; and it is therefore a peculiarly pleasing task to restore, if only to the eye, any ancient relic which has long ago ceased to exist, and of which no trace or recollection remains in the place it originally occupied.

The accompanying illustration represents the Font-cover which formerly stood in Ranworth church, and which may accordingly be now added to the list of the elaborate furniture it once possessed.



ANCIENT FONT-COVER,
FORMERLY IN RANWORTH CHURCH, NORFOLK.
From a Coloured Drawing, taken in 1705.

The drawing from which the wood-engraving is made, was executed in the year 1705, by T. T., the initials, it is believed, of the Rev. Thomas Toulmin. It is evidently most carefully copied from the carving itself, with more accuracy of detail than was usual with those who attempted to represent Gothic art a hundred and fifty years ago. It is highly coloured, as in the original; showing red and green as the principal colours, with gold on the mouldings, crockets, &c. The drawing also represents the Font itself, of which the bowl is apparently of the seventeenth century, and very plain; while the stem is ornamented with carvings or paintings of grapes and vine leaves. The artist has appended the following description to it.

Ad dñi M^o CCCC^{mo} v^{to} pⁱ. v. this space without inscripⁿ. . . . decay^d . . . Thome Archer et Agnetis uxo . . . the rest is wanting. The Font in y^e Church of Ranworth, which is of Stone and painted; y^e cover is of wood, neatly carved and painted, but in some parts decay'd, y^e angel of Lead, w^{ch} serves as a pulley, by w^{ch} y^e Cover is moved up and down, falling, beat y^e Cover to pieces, insomuch y^t it could not entirely be set together again, so that most part of y^e inscription is wanting. taken December 1. 1705. T. T. Ranworth is a small village in y^e County of Norfolk, 7 miles from Norwich.

The above fragment of inscription formerly on the Font-cover fortunately retains the two points of information which we should have been most desirous to learn;—the name of the benefactors who erected it, Thomas Archer and Agnes his wife; and the date, 1505. The ornamental furniture of churches was very frequently the gift of private individuals residing in the parish: many of the screens in Norfolk and Suffolk churches record the names of their pious donors. An instance, similar to the present one, of the gift of a Font-

cover occurs at Southacre, Norfolk, where an inscription carved upon it tells us that Master Richard Gotts, and Master Geoffrey Baker, Rector, were the benefactors: "*hoc opus fieri fecerunt.*" At Burgate, Suffolk, an inscription incised upon the stone step of the Font records the names of Sir William de Burgate and Eleanor his wife,* "*qui istum Fontem fieri fecerunt,*" and whose fine tomb with brass effigies, of the date of 1409, remains in the centre of the chancel, of which they were probably the builders. This was a gift, however, of the Font itself, and not merely of the cover: a similar donation was made to Walsoken church, Norfolk, 1544. It ought not to be forgotten by Norfolk archaeologists, that the earliest Font-cover known to exist in England, and probably the only one of the Decorated style, is that in Elsing church,† Norfolk, which is coæval with the rest of the building, most probably erected by Sir Hugh Hastings, who died in 1347.

* Proceedings of the Suffolk Archæological Institute, Vol. I. p. 211.

† Engraved in *Archæologia*, Vol. XVI. p. 336, plate 45.