

Fons et origo

The symbolic death, burial and resurrection of English font stones¹

by David Stocker

Based on a Lincolnshire sample, this paper identifies the phenomenon of 'font burial'. After exploring the theological and liturgical background, it suggests that this practice symbolises an understanding of baptism as death and burial as well as rebirth. This symbolic understanding draws our attention to both the decoration and materials used for fonts and highlights the extent to which font stones have been regarded as 'special' artefacts, treated in exceptional ways. A focus on their symbolic value privileges the reuse of older stones as fonts and examples of the 'conversion' of Roman and Anglo-Saxon monuments are documented.

Compared with most types of stone artefact, font stones seem 'special'. Pre-Reformation examples are, anyway, rarely discovered in locations indicating that they had been part of the cycle of use and reuse characteristic of most other categories of stonework (Stocker with Everson 1990). In more recent times fonts have been reused for a variety of non-ecclesiastical purposes; as bird-baths, horse-troughs, sundials and so on, but no example has yet come to light of a font bowl reused for profane purposes during the medieval period. This paper explores the evidence that font stones have indeed been treated differently, and shows that some redundant font bowls were disposed of in a way that ensured that profane reuse was not possible. They were buried with considerable reverence, either physically or symbolically, and burial was itself viewed as part of the symbolism appropriate to baptism.

A good example of such a font burial, and a rare case where detailed documentation survives, is at Haselbech

(Northants) (Bond 1908, 278). Here in 1860, the restoration of the church included the commissioning of a new font. According to the diary of a churchwarden, Blanche Band,² it was taken for granted by the parishioners at the time that the old font should be buried below the church floor, adjacent to the newly installed one. This seems to have been accepted, unquestioningly, as the correct thing to do in these circumstances, although the diary does not record any theological or other discussion on the point within the community. On digging below the site of the late medieval font, to their surprise the workmen came across an earlier, uncarved (perhaps 12th-century), font bowl which had already been buried beneath it. The late medieval font bowl was reverently placed alongside its predecessor and the newly carved font installed at ground level above them. In 1903, however, the knowledge that there was a late medieval font beneath the new one proved too strong a temptation for the vicar and, in that year, the 1860 font was sold for use in a new urban parish and the late medieval one was exhumed and reverently re-established in the location it had held prior to 1860, over its buried predecessor (Fig 1).

Haselbech is not an isolated case. A preliminary, superficial investigation has yielded a handful of similar examples in most counties, and the 39 examples collected so far are presented as lists 1a & b below. Only one county, Lincolnshire, has been thoroughly searched for this purpose, and here there are five records of fonts discovered buried beneath church floors (at Bassingham, Cabourne, Covenham St Mary, Ewerby and Folkingham). To these a further seven examples of a closely related phenomenon should be added. Here a font bowl is either recorded as having been set upside down to provide the base for a successor (at Barnoldby-le-Beck, Colsterworth, Saltfleetby All Saints and Tattershall), or where such a reversed bowl is suspected, given the present day appearance of the font (Alvingham, Great Limber and North Cockerington). Taken

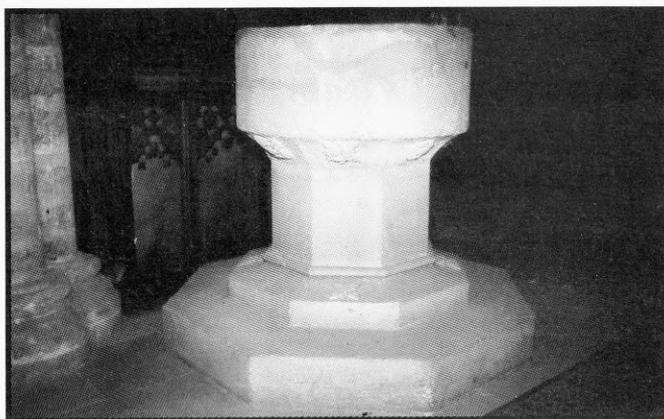


Fig 1 Font at St Michael's Haselbech (Northants). The uncarved predecessor to this late medieval font was buried beneath it when it was originally erected. In 1860 a new font was provided and this one joined its predecessor buried beneath. In 1903 it was 'resurrected' and re-established in this position. The original font is presumably still buried beneath (Photo: D Stocker)

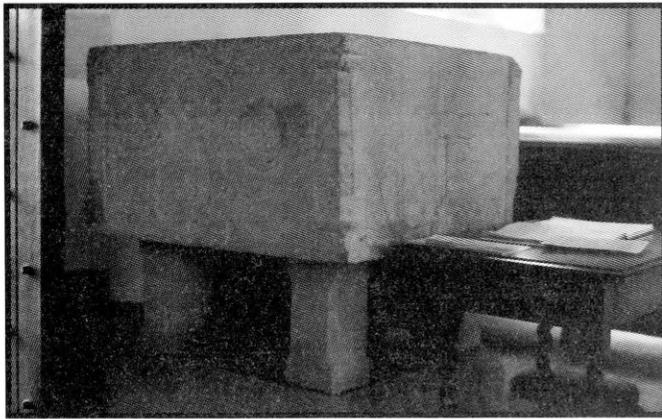


Fig 2 Font at St Edmund's Egleton (Rutland). The floriolate cross with stem and base (and to a lesser extent the plain cross) which decorate this early 13th-century font are of a type normally found on grave covers. Their employment here emphasises the font's symbolic meaning as a tomb (Photo: D Stocker)

together, these provide ten instances of the placement of a font on top of its predecessor in Lincolnshire churches plus two further cases of fonts discovered buried beneath the church floors in unknown locations (Bassingham and Cabourne). These 12 examples come from a population of some 650 churches in the county where a font exists or might have been expected, ie font burials have been recorded in approximately 2% of the county's churches. By way of comparison, in Essex there seem to be three cases of known or suspected font burials in 223 churches – a smaller, though not dissimilar proportion (Paul 1986).

If these figures were to be replicated nationally, and if we presume a total of about 8000 medieval churches of baptismal rank, we might expect to find something like 150 documented examples of such font burials in England. Such a large number cannot be easily dismissed. Functional explanations must play their part. The redundant bowls provided, for example, good quality, readily available, masonry for the new font's footings (in the cases of those mounted in the base of the new font) or foundations (in the cases of those buried below the floor). Such foundations also serve an important practical function as soakaways (Rodwell 1981, 122). However, the fact that we are dealing here specifically with font stones, which are usually reused intact in such contexts, suggests a more complex explanation is required.

The original number of such burials is likely to have been much higher. Virtually all of the examples of buried fonts in the lists are discoveries made in the last two centuries, during the course of grave-digging or floor replacement, and where a local antiquary has made a note of the discovery. There must have been many instances in the last two centuries where such discoveries have been made and gone unrecorded. Presumably, there were many more unrecorded discoveries in the three centuries between the 16th and the 19th. In the 19th century we frequently hear

of fonts being discovered lying in churchyards, in the Vicar's garden, or in other locations (short lists in Bond 1908, ch XVI and Tyrrell-Green 1928, 37–42), but it is much rarer that we hear how such examples arrived there. Although they are almost always said to have been removed either at the Reformation or during the Commonwealth, it may be that some at least had been buried beneath the church floor and were disturbed during routine post-medieval grave-digging. No clear examples of font burials have come to light during modern controlled excavation: the only realistic contenders, such as the ceramic vessel set beneath the nave floor at Raunds (Northants), have been convincingly interpreted as 'sacraria' (Parsons 1986).

Although the burial of redundant font bowls may seem strange, it is entirely consistent with the heavy symbolism surrounding the ritual of baptism in the medieval church. Baptism was symbolic of both birth *and* death. Doctrinally speaking, Christ died in order to eradicate sin through resurrection, and by means of baptism (the initiation into the family of Christ) the initiate can participate in the same cyclical journey from death to life. The basis of this doctrine is in St Paul: 'We were buried therefore with Him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in the newness of life' (Romans VI/1–4 and also Colossians II/12). The idea that baptism is a form of burial as well as rebirth is explicit both in canonical texts, such as St Ambrose who said 'The font is, as it were, a burial' (Davies 1962, 21), and in the iconography which surrounds baptism. This is made clear, for example, in the inscription cut into the font at Lullington (Som) which declares 'In this sacred font the sins of the people die by washing'. The early 13th-century font at Egleton (Rutland) provides a slightly different class of example (Fig 2). It is decorated with distinctive floriolate crosses of a type usually associated with gravecovers and it must be a deliberate attempt to associate the new font with contemporary tombs. Furthermore, the more complex iconography of death and resurrection is frequently found carved into English medieval fonts alongside that of birth and rebirth (Allen 1887, 286ff; Davies 1962, 80ff) – as at Lenton (Notts) where the four sides carry panels illustrating the crucifixion, the story of Lazarus and of the Maries at the tomb, as well as of the baptism of Christ. The intimate connections between death and rebirth in baptism could not be more explicit than in the juxtaposition of these four scenes on a single font.

In the medieval church, then, fonts take their place in a cycle of birth, death and resurrection and do not represent a single, one-way transition from non-life to life. Viewed against this background we should not be too surprised that the receptacle of the baptismal water, the font bowl, should take on the symbolic significance of the grave or tomb. Given the symbolic value of baptism as, also, burial, it

should not be surprising that evidence can be found for the symbolic burial of fonts in church floors at the end of their functional life. Certainly, such direct symbolism would have been more accessible than that claimed for the octagonal shape of many font bowls, which has been interpreted as a symbol of the resurrection (Bond 1908, 57–9; Davies 1962, 66–7).

The cyclical character of this symbolic burial is made even more explicit by the few details we have relating to the location of buried fonts. In the majority of cases documented so far we do not know where in the naves these burials were sited, and none are recorded as having been in the choir. Haselbech, however, is only one of several cases where we know that the old font was buried directly below its replacement. This was also the case for example, with the potentially Saxon font at Potterne (Wilts), which was found buried below its late medieval successor in 1872.³ A Norman font was discovered below the 18th-century font at Folkingham (Lincs), whilst at Ewerby, the symbolic message of burial and renewal is made quite explicit by the fact that the upper part of the old 12th-century font was left exposed to view, forming a decorated podium on which its early 14th-century successor was placed (Fig 3). In these cases the physical relationship between the two fonts must be seen, surely, as a deliberate symbolic juxtaposition, whereby belief in the cycle of death and rebirth through Christ in baptism is represented through the death and rebirth of the font vessel itself. The new bowl is legitimated by standing, literally, on the shoulders of its predecessor. The new font should be seen as ‘arising out’ of the old, it is visibly a ‘resurrection’ of its predecessor.

Before going on to consider some of the broader implications of font burials, we should distinguish between the two types of symbolic burial for which the cases in list 1 provide evidence. The group of font bowls which are buried below the church floor, as at Haselbech (list 1a), seem to be mostly early examples. The earliest buried bowl at Haselbech was, presumably, of the 12th century or earlier, whilst the buried examples at Potterne and Cabourne are said to be of pre-Conquest date (although the latter is not thought to be earlier than the late 11th century (Everson & Stocker forthcoming)). In the Potterne case, the bowl is said to have been at a depth of 4ft below the floor (Bond 1908, 127) and other examples of burial at similar depths are reported. It may be that burial of the font bowl wholly beneath the contemporary floor, so that the bowl was no longer visible, was an earlier practice, preceding a somewhat later preference for reusing the upturned bowl of the redundant font as a base or plinth for its successor. On the other hand, the burial of the later medieval bowl at Haselbech alongside its predecessor indicates that such burials did not disappear totally during the medieval period, and the discovery of the remains of the ‘late



Fig 3 Font at St Andrew's Ewerby (Lincs). The octagonal, 14th-century font is set above the partly buried tub of its highly decorated 12th-century predecessor. At one level it symbolises the antiquity of baptismal rights at Ewerby. At a deeper level, the new font is seen to ‘arise out’ of the old, symbolising baptism's meaning as both burial and ‘resurrection’ (Photo: D Stocker)

Transitional’ style font buried beneath the 18th-century font at Folkingham indicates, like the Haselbech case, that ‘deep’ burial was persistent.

Even so, none of the new bowls set over earlier redundant bowls (such that the earlier bowl was still visible) seem to be much earlier in date than the 13th century. These examples of the reuse of earlier bowls in the stems of later fonts seem to arise at the same time as the earlier ‘tub’ type of font, which sat directly on the floor, fell out of fashion (see typology eg Bond 1908). At Tattershall, for example, a 14th-century font bowl was used as the base for its later 15th-century successor (although the latter bowl has itself been replaced). The Tattershall case is made all the more intriguing by the fact that the church was completely (and expensively) rebuilt in the third quarter of the 15th century and, therefore, the upturned 14th-century font bowl would have been almost the only evidence visible to contemporaries indicating the ecclesiastical antiquity of the site. As one would expect however, the more usual pattern seems to be 12th- or 13th-century bowls set upside down as the bases for 14th- or 15th-century fonts (as at Barnoldby-le-Beck or Colsterworth).

Tattershall is a good example where display of the early font bowl in the base of the new font accommodates the practice of the reverent disposal of the old bowl through a symbolic ‘burial’ within the stem of the new font, whilst at the same time displaying the old bowl as a symbol of the antiquity of baptismal rights held by this church. In such examples, then, the earlier font stones at the base of the later fonts are not only symbolically ‘buried’, but are probably also being flaunted as markers of the church’s seniority.

There is, in fact, a group of 12th-century font designs which seem intended to give the impression that they are new bowls set over older ones, even though no old bowl is

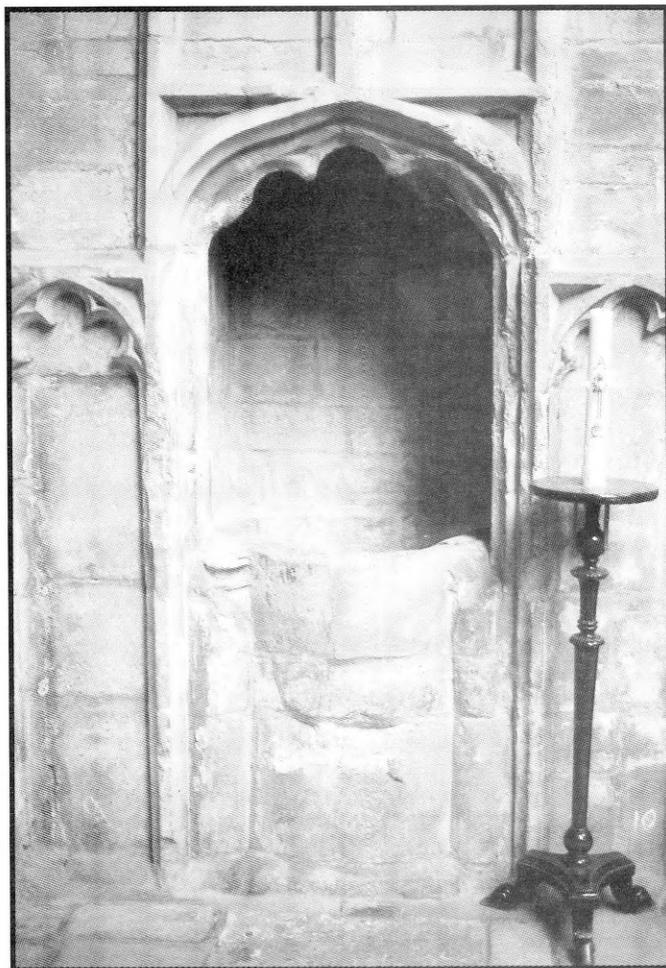


Fig 4 Font at Crowland Abbey (Lincs). This 13th century font has been enclosed within the south east pier of the parochial bell-tower, which was built in the 1460s. There was evidently an aversion to moving it from its original site (Photo: D Stocker)

used. This is the so-called 'Aylesbury group', with examples at: Aylesbury, Bledlow, Buckland, Chenies, Great Kimble, Great and Little Missenden, Weston Turville, Wing (all Bucks) and Houghton Regis (Beds) (Tyrrell-Green 1928, 123; Zarnecki 1953, 43–4). In these cases the bases take the form of massive scallop capitals, and although it seems bizarre at first sight, the elaborate foliage decoration on the base is carved upside-down relative to the functional bowl. If the bases of these fonts are understood, not as structural bases but as imitations of upturned, earlier, font bowls, then the foliage makes more sense. When new, these fonts may have conveyed the message that they continue a tradition of baptism in each church, even though the whole font was clearly carved at a single time, and for all we know, in some cases the right of baptism may have been recently granted. If this is a correct analysis, the setting of old font bowls in the bases of new fonts may have already formed a well understood symbolic language when these major monuments of Romanesque art were made.

Alongside this evidence of reverence for the physical stone of the font, a reverence for the sites of fonts within

churches is occasionally apparent. The siting of medieval fonts at the western end of the nave, near the entrances to the church is a well-understood, overt symbol of the entrance of the Christian soul into the Church (eg Davies 1962, 61ff). But a reverence for the physical site occupied by the font may underlie the handful of cases where 12th- and 13th-century fonts are actually built into later medieval buildings, for example at Crowland (Lincs) (Fig 4),⁴ Great Abington, Little Shelford, Barton and Rampton (all Cambs) (Paley 1844, 11). In these examples it appears that the early font site was thought to be so important that rebuilding of the church fabric had to respect its location and incorporate the old font in the new building. These cases may be related to those of one font being physically rooted in its predecessor. They are further evidence that the site of the font itself was held in special regard and that it was important that it remained static even when major building work re-oriented the church fabric around it.

Ritualised burial of fonts may be classed as another aspect of the well-attested 'semi-official', folk ritual surrounding fonts. The potency of 'holy water' in such folk rituals is easily illustrated by the 13th-century injunctions to cover and lock fonts (eg Bond 1908, 281ff), to prevent the font lid being lifted to steal the water for profane or occult purposes (detailed in Davies 1962, 70ff). The staples which were consequently provided at places such as Wickenby (Lincs) still survive, and the damage caused to the stonework when they were removed is frequently seen. This type of superstition is focused, however, on the potency of the consecrated water rather than the stone bowl in which the water was held. Indeed, there is some confusion at different periods as to whether or not the font bowl (as distinct from the water inside) was actually 'consecrated'. There is no service for the consecration of a font *per se*, although the service for the consecration of a new church usually includes blessing of the font along with other fittings (Rollason, 1988). Medieval services of baptism do not distinguish clearly between water and receptacle – and the water is certainly consecrated (full refs in Bond 1908, 275). However, the 16th-century Protestant view was that the Roman church did consecrate the font bowl, as distinct from the water inside it, and instances of blessings of font stones are reported in 16th- and 17th-century England (*ibid*, 275–76; Davies 1962, 96). Even though there is no detailed form of ritual for the consecration of font stones, archaeological evidence for font burial seems to indicate quite conclusively that the physical fabric of the font was regarded with an exceptional reverence. Furthermore, treatment of the font stones is almost exactly paralleled by the equally reverent burial inside churches of altar stones following the Reformation, and altar stones, of course, were formally consecrated (Rollason 1988; Morris 1989, 374). The outward sign of the consecration of altar stones was the

inscription of small crosses in the surface. This prompts speculation that the small inscribed crosses found on some fonts, for example that on the crude bowl at Flixborough (Lincs) (Fig 5), are the outward sign of some sort of informal dedication ceremony.⁵

So, regardless of the lack of official documentation, the archaeological evidence establishes that the stones which formed fonts were themselves regarded with reverence. A general appreciation that this was the case is clear from any analysis of the surviving population of fonts, which would show, surely, a great number of surviving 12th-century examples when compared with the total number of churches of this date. This must be a crude indicator that the font stones were thought to be of sufficient significance to be moved from an old church to the new one during rebuilding and reconstruction (as is the case at Tattershall). More specific evidence is provided by numerous cases of badly battered font bowls which are earlier in date than the pillars which support them. In such cases, the whole area around the font has been modernised but the font bowl itself, the part in contact with the baptismal water, has been reverently preserved. This is seen for example at Threekingham (Lincs) where a simple arcaded bowl, which cannot be much later in date than about 1250, has been preserved and reset on a shaft and base dated by a 'black-letter' inscription – a letter-form type almost unknown before the mid 14th century. Threekingham is merely one example: such resettings of earlier bowls are easy to find and they are further instances of the physical terms in which sanctity was perceived in the Middle Ages. The same impulse to preserve a stone, which was seen as having a value beyond that of builder's or sculptor's raw material, is probably behind the many instances in England of the recutting of the sculpture on fonts in the later and post-medieval periods (for example at Westborough (Lincs); see other examples in Bond 1908, 91). Whether these font bowls were regarded as having been 'consecrated' or not (and that would probably always have depended on how theologically learned was the person asked), it is clear that the font stone itself was regarded as having acquired a special status simply through physical contact with the baptismal water. Furthermore the preservation of parts of the stems and bases of earlier fonts in the fabric of their successors (as at Horbling (Lincs), or Nazeing (Essex)) indicates that this 'special' status was not accorded to the font bowl alone. Thus the consecrated water endows the receptacle with holiness through contact, in the same way that physical contact with the bodies of saints was thought to confer sanctity on otherwise insignificant objects.

All this evidence that font stones were treated with a clear reverence once they had participated in the baptismal ceremony, prompts the question of whether selection of the stones themselves was undertaken with any special care.

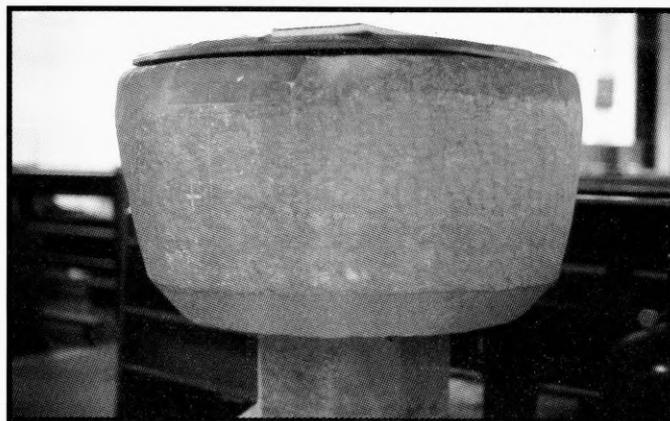


Fig 5 Font at All Saints Flixborough (Lincs). This font is in a church built on a new site in the 1780s. It was reportedly brought from the ruins of the former church of Little Conesby, half a mile away, and has been claimed as Anglo-Saxon in date. The only decoration is the small incised cross, which might be evidence that the font bowl has been formally consecrated (Photo: D Stocker)

Were some stones, or stone types, thought to be especially appropriate for this sacramental role?

Unfortunately the evidence for such selection of stones for fonts is rather patchy. The majority of English fonts are of simple freestone, often the same as the church fabric itself. In such cases the fonts are usually lined with lead, presumably because most freestones in this country are porous. There is, of course, an important group of Romanesque fonts which are made entirely of lead (Zarnecki 1957). If such fonts are deliberately imitating Roman baptismal tanks, lead must have been selected mainly because the tanks could not easily have been made of anything else. Even so, it is worth observing that lead was also widely used for the lining of coffins in both the Roman and the Medieval periods and, given that fonts symbolise death as well as rebirth, it is not impossible that some symbolic message is intended in the choice of this material for fonts. In most cases where it is possible to check, however, the lead lining of font bowls was removed before they were buried, and this shows, I suppose, that the symbolic value of this material was not sufficiently great to overcome its functional value as a recycled material.

Indeed, in addition to more functional considerations, stone may have been preferred to lead precisely because of its own symbolic message. William Durandus for example, writing at the end of the 13th century, advised that 'the font should be of stone because the water that flowed from the rock in the wilderness typifies baptism' (Davies 1962, 67). Stone fonts could be made from a variety of types of stone, and marble was especially widely used, often being obtained from considerable distances. Marble, even the English pseudo-marbles like Purbeck, is not only non-porous but, no doubt, had overtones of luxury and costliness to the medieval mind which would have been thought appropriate to such important objects. But was marble used for fonts solely for such functional reasons?



Fig 6 Font at St Mary's Abbey Shrewsbury (Salop). The font bowl is a re-cut base from a column in a major Roman building – probably at *Virconium* (Wroxeter) ten miles to the south

Given what has already been said about the intimate symbolic relationship between baptism and burial is it possible that there is an intentional evocation of the tomb here?

Marble, of course, was a material widely used for sarcophagi in the Roman world and we have many instances from medieval England of marble being sought out for important sarcophagi. Furthermore Professor Davies (1962, 80) drew attention to the similarity between the lines of mourners under architectural arcades on the side of certain Roman marble sarcophagi and the lines of apostles or saints under arcades carved around many 12th- and 13th-century fonts. These fonts may allude to the tomb, but the extent to which the material itself was thought to symbolise the tomb is difficult to establish. Much more explicit, are a number of northern European marble fonts which take the physical form of marble sarcophagi. There is an important 12th-century group in northern France, for example, which is modelled on the magnificent font of Amiens Cathedral and there are others at Senlis Cathedral, Airaines and at Munkarp in northern Germany (last two cited by Davies 1962, 65). In these the message that

baptism was a burial of the baptised is quite clear. A deliberate recollection of the sarcophagus is also likely to be the explanation for the occasional trough-shaped English fonts in freestone such as the 'Eastbourne group' (Tyrrell-Green 1928, 128–29) and other more individual examples at Bridekirk (Cumb), Edwalton (Notts), Llanfair-y-Cwmmwd (Ang) and Bassingham. These British examples are not in marble and the case that marble was selected as a material for fonts partly in recollection of sarcophagi remains difficult to demonstrate. Even if marble examples like those at Amiens and Senlis are quite rare (and not English), we should be aware of the possibility that the selection of stone type may be, amongst other things, deliberately evocative of the symbolic connections between fonts and tombs.

A reference to the cultural kudos which Roman artefacts undoubtedly held for the medieval mind seems to be more clearly intended in a number of fonts where the stones themselves are reused Roman ones. The selection of Roman stones is undoubtedly also partly functional; Roman columns (drums in particular) make excellent fonts (list 3). However, there may be more to it than this. The medieval borough of Shrewsbury was the successor to Roman *Virconium* a few miles down the Severn and the stone from which the font bowl in Shrewsbury Abbey is made must have come from a major Roman building there (Fig 6). It would be naively patronising to think that the medieval mind would not have perceived the symbolic significance of the transportation and 'conversion' of this fragment from a pagan building at *Virconium* to its Christian successor, for refashioning as a font – one of the symbolic corner-stones of the Christian liturgy. The stone itself has, if you like, been converted from paganism to Christianity: 'reborn' in the rite of baptism.

The symbolic meaning of such transformations is particularly clear where the Roman stone was itself an altar. This transformation, from Roman altar to Christian font, occurs in at least five examples, mostly in the north of England (list 2). We should not be too surprised by this observation; we are, after all, quite at home with the adoption and Christianization of a whole range of Roman artefacts (Stocker with Everson 1990) and this adoption of Roman stones for fonts is merely another aspect of the same process.

A similar impulse may be at work in the rare examples of the selection of Anglo-Saxon carved cross shafts for reuse as fonts. There appear to be six documented examples of this (list 4), and there is no reason to doubt that the symbolism of the reuse of a cross (signifying death and rebirth) for a font (also signifying death and rebirth) was intended by the font maker. Such stones may have been of a useful size or shape, but if they were selected only for their physical characteristics, their ancient sculpture would not have been retained in their second use – and it was retained. Part of

Fig 7 Font at St Michael's Bassingham (Lincs). This font was cut from an Anglo-Scandinavian grave cover. When it was replaced, a hole was deliberately knocked through the base and the font was buried in the floor of the nave (Photo: British Academy, Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture archive)

the attraction of such stones must have been the kudos of antiquity which they brought with them, and, more interestingly, the reuse of monuments originally associated with death and burial for fonts, which were illustrative of rebirth.

The rectangular 'tank-like' font at Bassingham illustrates all of the points raised so far (Fig 7). The stone was originally part of a large 10th-century tomb-chest, which was cut into sections (perhaps in the 12th or 13th century). One of these sections was hollowed out to form a tank which was probably used as a font (Everson & Stocker forthcoming). The recutting for this purpose is deliberate and careful and it seems likely that the original decoration was considered to be important in its secondary function. As a font we may speculate that it drew kudos from the fact that the stone was recognised as ancient and gained symbolic meaning in its role as a font from the fact that it had originally formed part of a tomb. It is also an elongated 'tank' shape which, although to some extent forced on the sculptor by the shape of the original Anglo-Saxon sculpture, could also be said to have given it the shape of a small sarcophagus. It ceased to be a font, presumably, in the late-medieval period (the present font is late 14th- or 15th-century), when it was reverently buried in the nave

floor. Exactly where in the nave it was buried we do not know, but the evidence of analogues may suggest it was buried in the vicinity of the font which replaced it. The Bassingham font, then, was a stone with a symbolic life-cycle: it had been quarried out of the ground to make a tomb, then it was 'resurrected' for use as a font and then returned to the ground, perhaps to support its successors.

The Bassingham font has one final, symbolic, feature. It appears to have been ritually 'killed'. Archaeologists are familiar with the ritual 'killing' of artefacts at the end of their useful life, often as a precursor to being reverently disposed of through burial (Merrifield 1987, esp ch 8). In ceramic pots and other similar vessels such 'killing' takes the form of the deliberate breaking of the base of the object. The Bassingham font seems to have undergone just such a mutilation, as an irregular hole has been driven through the base of the tank. Although one could speculate how various accidents might have caused such damage, it had apparently occurred before the font was buried in the church floor and much the easiest explanation is that the damage was deliberately made prior to its burial. On the face of it, this 'killing' of the redundant font bowl prior to its burial seems to be yet another aspect of the font's role in the symbolic cycle of birth and death. This case might suggest alternative

explanations for some of the major repairs visible in the bowls of many fonts across the country. Although such damage is usually attributed to Roundhead troopers we should perhaps ask how much of it was ritualistic.

It seems clear that font stones, and to some extent font sites, have been treated with a special reverence which arose out of their value as material symbols of the cycle of birth, death and resurrection; a cycle which is fundamental to Christian beliefs. This reverence is expressed, not just through the rituals of baptism themselves, but also through the ritual burial of the font bowl at the end of its life and use as the base for its successor. We should therefore be particularly interested in cases where Roman or Anglo-Saxon artefacts were selected for reuse as medieval fonts. The symbolism of any such reuse or adaptation will have been important to, and well understood by, medieval contemporaries. Finally, this evidence for the symbolic value of some of the actual stones from which fonts are made should alert us to the possibility that some stone types, such as the English marbles, might have been endowed with symbolic values as well as more functional ones.

Acknowledgements

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David Stocker works as an Inspector for English Heritage on the Monuments Protection Programme.

Notes

1. This paper arises out of one originally given at the Medieval Europe conference at the University of York in September 1992. I am grateful to Dr P Graves for her help at that stage.
2. I am grateful to Mr Michael Manser of Haselbech for allowing me access to Blanche Band's diary, in his possession, and for his help in gaining access to the church in 1992.
3. The dating of the Potterne font has been the subject of much debate – outlined in Taylor (1978, 1064–65). Excavations beneath the church suggested that the font had originally been sited in a small pre-Viking baptistry to the south of the main church (Davey 1964). However, when discovered in 1872, the font bowl was towards the west end of the medieval church under the present font. If the font did originally belong in the southern 'baptistry', it had been moved by the date of the installation of the later medieval font.
4. Bond (1908, 89) discusses the Crowland example as an instance

of the provision of a piscina alongside a font to allow the reverent disposal of 'soiled' water generated in the baptism service. This whole interpretation of secondary piscinae has been attacked (Davies 1962, 72ff). Regardless of this wider argument, the second font at Crowland is certainly a century or so earlier than the 14th-century parochial font which stands to its north, and it is demonstrably enclosed by the masonry of the early 15th-century tower pier, as though it could not be moved from its 'hallowed' site and the tower pier had to be built around it.

5. I owe this suggestion to Mr Paul Everson.

List 1) Preliminary draft list of font bowls reportedly discovered under church floors and set beneath successors:

List 1a) 'Deep' burials

Alderley (Ches)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 188)
Bassingham (Lincs)	Cole (1898, 387)
Bosbury (Herefd)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 166)
Cabourne (Lincs)	Anon (1981, 124)
Covenham St Mary (Lincs)	Sutton (1898, 113)
Curdworth (Warks)	Bond (1908, 131)
Ewerby (Lincs)	Sutton (1904, 106)
Folkingham (Lincs)	Anon (1914, 323)
Grappenhall (Ches)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 188)
Great Waltham (Essex)	Paul (1986, 99)
Haselbech (Northants)	Bond (1908, 278)
Lympne (Kent)	Pratt Boorman & Torr (1954, 56)
Potterne (Wilts)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 166)
Ramsey (Cambs)	Wise & Noble (1881, 170)
Stonegrave (Yorks)	Church Guide

List 1b) Early font bowls set within bases of successors

Alvingham (Lincs)?	Sutton (1898, 106)
Barnoldby-le-Beck (Lincs)	Birch (1993, 12)
Barton (Cambs)	Pevsner (1970, 299)
Bilsthorpe (Notts)	Observation
Colsterworth (Lincs)	Trollope (1876a, 21)
Cornelly (Corn)	Bond (1908, 91)
Curdworth (Warks)	Bond (1908, 91)
East Markham (Notts)	Cox (1912, 142)
Edlingham (Nthumb)	Church Guide
Ewerby (Lincs)	Sutton (1904, 106)
Gedling (Notts)	Cox (1912, 97)
Great Limber (Lincs)?	Trollope (1878, 161)
Hatfield (Herts)	Church Guide
Launceston (Corn)	Church Guide
Lower Peover (Ches)	Church Guide
North Cockerington (Lincs)?	Sutton (1898, 107)
North Fambridge (Essex)?	Paul (1986, 149)
Oakham (Rutland)?	Bond (1908, 91)
Rampton (Cambs)	Evelyn-White (1911, 149)
Saltfleetby All Saints (Lincs)	Fowler (1874, 16–7)
Sellindge (Kent)	Church Guide
Tattershall (Lincs)	Trollope (1876b, 161)
Thorpe-by-Newark (Notts)?	Cox (1912, 216–17)
West Hanningfield (Essex)	Paul (1986, 210)
Woolstaston (Salop)	Bond (1908, 91–4)
Worth (Sussex)	Bond (1908, 91)

List 1c) Font bowls found buried in churchyard or adjacent vicarage garden

Ashen (base only) (Essex)	Paul (1986, 32)
Chesterfield (Derbys)	Church Guide
Gilling East (Yorks)	Church Guide
Haddenham (Cambs)	Evelyn-White (1911, 87)
Preston St Peter (Sussex)	Church Guide
Rottingdean (Sussex)	Church Guide
Trottscliffe (Kent)	Church Guide
Whaddon (Warks)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 226)

List 2) Provisional list of Roman altars incorporated into fonts

Bowes (Durham) (shaft)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 167)
Chollerton (Nthumb)	Bond (1908, 99)
Great Sakeld (Cumb)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 167) (but see Bond 1908, 99)
Haydon Bridge (Nthumb)	Bond (1908, 99)
Lund (Lancs)	Droop (1933)
Michaelchurch (Herefd)	Collingwood & Wright (1965, 103) (probably a stoup rather than a font)
St John Lee (Nthumb)	Bond (1908, 99)
Staunton (Glos)	Green (1928, 22) (but see Bond 1908, 99)

List 3) Provisional list of fonts reusing other Roman stone

Bowes (Durham)(bowl) – shaft	Cox & Harvey (1907, 167)
Hexham (Nthumb) – base/capital	Bond (1908, 98–9)
Kentchester (Herefd) – shaft	Bond (1908, 98–9)
Lincoln St Peter Gowts – shaft	Church Guide
Over Denton (Cumb) – capital	Bond (1908, 98–9)
Romaldkirk (Durham) – shaft	Church Guide
Shrewsbury Abbey (Salop) – base	Cranage (1901)
West Mersea (Essex) – shaft	Paul (1986, 211)
Woolstaston (Salop) – base	Bond (1908, 93–4)
Wroxteter (Salop) – base/capital	Bond (1908, 98–9)

List 4) Provisional list of fonts reusing Anglo-Saxon carved stones

Bassingham (Lincs)	Everson & Stocker (forthcoming)
Bingley (Yorks)?	Bond (1908, 129–30)
Deerhurst (Glos)	Taylor & Taylor (1965, 206)
Dolton (Devon)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 167)
Melbury Bubb (Dorset)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 167)
Wilne (Derbys)	Cox & Harvey (1907, 167)

Rothbury (Nthumb) and Penmon (Ang) are cases where Anglo-Saxon stones have been re-used in fonts in the post-medieval period.

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