

Overlap at the intersecting arcade: which way does it go?

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Blank arcading was commonly employed as a decorative feature in the 12th and 13th centuries. A particularly ornamental version had each adjacent arch overlapping. Examples survive on wall surfaces of cathedrals and churches in England and can also be found on baptismal fonts of the period, as the only decoration or accompanied by other ornament. The simplest form of intersection at overlapping semicircular arcades is where the limbs merge (Fig 1a). More often the arcading is given added decorative interest by passing one limb in front of another, the same pattern continuing along a succession of arcades in a regular manner. Here there is a choice between two versions, each imparting a sense of direction. Where the ascending limb of each arcade passes in front of the descending limb of the preceding one as one moves to the left (LH) this could be described as left-hand overlap (Fig 1b). Right-hand overlap (RH) would describe the reverse arrangement, the ascending limb of each arcade passing in front of the descending limb of the preceding arcade as one moves to the right (Fig 1c). The font at All Saints, Oakham (Rutland) (Fig 2a) is an example of the former; that at St Denis, Silk Willoughby (Lincs) of the latter (Fig 2b). Arcades showing merging without overlap, which could be described as neutral (N) are also found at a number of sites (see below).

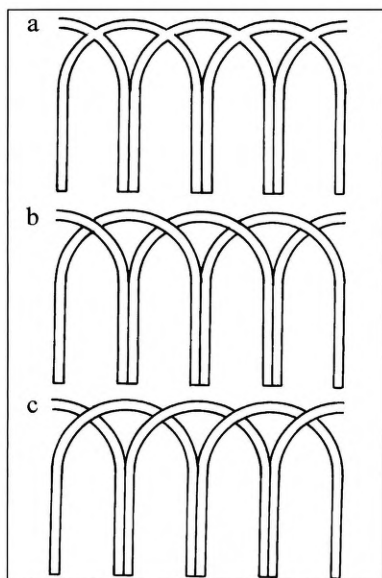


Fig 1- a, b, c Different versions of intersecting arcades: a) limbs of arcading merging; b) left-hand overlap (LH); c) right-hand overlap (RH) (Illustration: A Alment)

Studies of font ornament amongst around 1300 still surviving from Norman and Transitional periods in England have revealed 56 examples of intersecting arcade decoration. Of these, 31 are RH, 11 are LH and 11 are N. Some examples were illustrated in Combe & Paley's *Illustrations of baptismal fonts* (1844) and Bond's *Fonts and font covers* (1985) and referred to by Tyrell-Green (1912), but the full extent of intersecting arcading was identified by details given in Pevsner's *Buildings of England* series and confirmed by site visits and information provided by incumbents. In order to test whether the apparent strong bias towards the RH pattern shown amongst fonts was a feature of such arcading generally, evidence was sought of the incidence of types encountered in surviving wall arcades of the period. Amongst a small number - 23 - illustrated in texts, the ratio of RH to LH was balanced at 11:12.

The reason for this apparent bias towards RH pattern on fonts is not clear. Perhaps in setting out the design on a cylindrical structure there is greater convenience in moving to the right. There are signs that errors are more likely here than on a flat wall surface. The font at St James, Avebury (Wilts) shows a confusion of RH and LH over part of the sequence, while the font at All Saints, Oakham (Rutland) is seen to have a pair of the LH arcades stretched almost double to meet an error in measuring the design (Fig 2a). The possibility that a left-handed mason might prefer to set out a LH pattern seems very unlikely; left-handedness affects only 10-15% of the population. There are two examples of both patterns on the same font, though different in ornamental detail, at SS Mary & Lawrence, Great Bricett (Suffolk) and St John the Baptist, South Croxton (Leics).

Where wall arcading is concerned, both patterns can be found on the same building, though not in the same continuous sequence (Castle Acre Priory (Norfolk), Ely Cathedral (Cambs), Lincoln Cathedral (Lincs) and Peterborough Cathedral (Huntingdon & Peterborough) are examples). At Peterborough the north and south nave aisles each have intersecting blank arcading inside the outer walls. The western two bays of the south arcade and the western four of the north follow the RH pattern, the remaining arcading of both aisles being LH. But they are not continuous; there is a separating doorway at each point of change. It is possible that the alteration represents a change of plan during the building of the nave which had been

advancing westwards, the south aisle having progressed further than the north by two bays. Where both patterns are found on the west front of Castle Acre Priory, the lowest stage has RH arcading each side of the doorway at ground level, but LH across the third stage and also in both north and south aisles.



Fig 2a At All Saints, Oakham (Rutland) showing left-hand overlapping intersecting arcade;

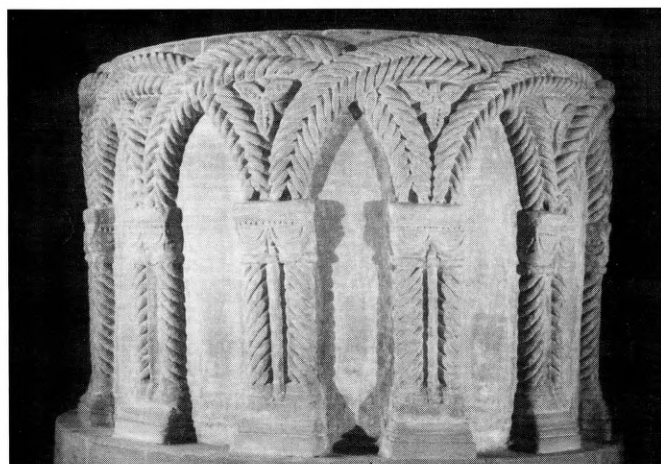


Fig 2b Font at St Denis, Silk Willoughby (Lincs) with right-hand overlapping intersecting arcade (Photos: A Alment)

As arcading was used as a decorative feature, with added ornament of double roll and intermediate bands of pellet or lozenge in many later examples, it seems curious that the opportunity provided for creating a symmetrical balance between the choice of RH or LH patterns does not seem to have been employed in sections of wall arcade. The chancel of St John's, Devizes (Wilts) is a good example of determined use of a single (RH) pattern continuing along north, east and south walls, and there is also consistent RH pattern in miniature on the capitals of two supporting shafts in the sequence. The pleasing west front of St Lawrence, Castle Rising (Norfolk), described as 'swagger' by Pevsner, displays apparently Norman work in which the pattern changes mirror-wise about the central upper arch. This shows the added decorative effect possible with a balanced design, but

it seems to have originated in the extensive restoration carried out in the 19th century, since an earlier drawing by JS Cotman in 1811 shows consistent RH pattern across the whole front.

This preliminary look at intersecting arcading is limited to a few buildings found in England. It raises the question whether adoption of a symmetrical pattern to create a more pleasing overall balance was beyond the vision of masons with their sights set on copy books. Other examples from the period may provide a firm answer.

The fonts included in the list below are more likely to represent a sufficient proportion of those surviving in England to make the inexplicable bias towards RH pattern significant. It would be useful for future study of this detail if the direction of overlap could be recorded in descriptions of intersecting arcades. A simple form of definition such as RH, LH or N is suggested.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr David Parsons of Leicester University for advice in preparing this paper, and to Mr Beric Morley for help in identifying examples in buildings. I wish to also thank those incumbents who responded with information about fonts in their care.

The late Sir Anthony Alment was a retired obstetric doctor who has studied early ornament in churches, especially fonts.

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 Stoll, RT, 1966, *Architecture and sculpture in early Britain*, Thames & Hudson
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Some buildings with intersection wall arcading and its type:			
Bristol Cathedral, chapter house (Som)	LH	Kelso Cathedral, west front porch (Roxburghs)	LH
Bury St Edmunds Cathedral, gatehouse (Suffolk)	LH	Lincoln Cathedral, west front (Lincs)	LH
Castle Acre Priory, west front, ground level (Norfolk)	LH	Lincoln Cathedral, west transept (Lincs)	LH
Castle Acre Priory, west front, above doorway (Norfolk)	RH	Lincoln Cathedral, south-west tower (Lincs)	RH
Castle Acre Priory, north aisle (Norfolk)	LH	Norwich Cathedral, south transept, east wall (Norfolk)	LH
Castle Acre Priory, south aisle (Norfolk)	LH	Peterborough Cathedral, nave, east outer aisle (Huntgdon & Peterborough)	LH
Castle Rising Castle, forebuilding, east front (Norfolk)	RH	Peterborough Cathedral, nave, west outer aisle (Huntgdon & Peterborough)	RH
Castle Rising, St Lawrence, west front (Norfolk)	originally RH	Peterborough Cathedral, St Benedict's Chapel, south wall (Huntgdon & Peterborough)	RH
Holy Trinity, Christchurch, north transept (Hants)	RH	Southwell Minster, tower (Notts)	RH
Devizes, St John's Church, chancel (Wilts)	RH	St Alban's Abbey, south transept, south wall, former slype (Herts)	RH
Durham Cathedral, south nave aisle (Durham)	RH		
Ely Cathedral, south transept, south wall (Cambs)	LH		
Ely Cathedral, south-west transept, south wall (Cambs)	LH		
Ely Cathedral, St Catherine's Chapel (Cambs)	RH		

Fonts with RH intersecting arcading	
Affpuddle, St Lawrence (Dorset)	Lydiard Millicent, All Saints (Wilts)
Alphington, St Michael & All Angels (Devon)	Mollington, All Saints (Oxon)
Askerswell, St Michael (Dorset)	Naughton, St Mary (Suffolk)
Avebury, St James (Wilts)	Osbournby, SS Peter & Paul (Lincs)
Botley, All Saints (Hants)	Oxhill, St Lawrence (Warks)
Branston, St Saviour (Leics)	Portchester, St Mary (Hants)
Breckles, St Margaret (Suffolk)	Preston, St Mary the Virgin (Suffolk)
Canewdon, St Nicholas (Essex)	Salford, St Mary (Oxon)
Canterbury, SS Martin & Paul (Kent)	Sculthorpe, St Mary & All Saints (Norfolk)
Deeping St Nicholas, St James (Lincs)	Silk Willoughby, St Denis (Lincs)
East Haddon, St Mary the Virgin (Northants)	Skirpenbeck, St Mary (Yorks)
Hartland, St Nectan (Devon)	Stonesby, St Peter (Leics)
Hendon, St Mary (Middx)	Tickencote, St Peter (Northants)
Hornton, St John the Baptist (Oxon)	Waltham on the Wolds, St Mary Magdalene (Leics)
Kirkburn, St Mary (Yorks)	West Camel, All Saints (Som)
Lullington, All Saints (Som)	

Fonts with LH intersecting arcading	
Bere Regis, St John the Baptist (Dorset)	Hardwick, St Mary (Oxon)
Birley, St Peter (Heref)	Ingoldisthorpe, St Michael (Norfolk)
Coleby, All Saints (Lincs)	Kirksmeaton, St Peter (Yorks)
Crambe, St Michael (Yorks)	Oakham, All Saints (Rutland)
Donington-on-Bain, St Andrew (Lincs)	Southend, St Laurence & All Saints (Essex)
Hanwell, St Peter (Oxon)	

Fonts with both LH and RH intersecting arcading	
Great Bricett, SS Mary & Lawrence (Suffolk)	Chadshunt, All Saints (Warks)
South Croxton, St John the Baptist (Leics)	

Fonts with both N intersecting arcading	
Chedworth, St Andrew (Glos)	Sandridge, St Leonard (Herts)
Coton, St Peter (Cambs)	Stainburn, St Mary (Yorks)
Croxby, All Saints (Lincs)	Stoke Orchard, St James the Great (Glos)
Halse, St James (Som)	Weston on the Green, St Mary (Oxon)
Lifton, St Mary (Devon)	Withersdale, St Mary Magdalene (Suffolk)
Lockington, St Nicholas (Leics)	

The Society for Church Archaeology is saddened by the death of Sir Anthony Alment shortly before the publication of this paper.