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**Remarks on the Ancient Baptismal Font in Staunton Church,
Gloucestershire**

by H. M. Scarth
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REMARKS ON THE ANCIENT BAPTISMAL FONT
IN STAUNTON CHURCH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

By THE REV. CANON SCARTH, M.A.

THE Stone Font in Staunton Church, which has been thought to be a Roman altar adapted to Christian uses, is of very rude and primitive form.

It is almost a solid cube, being hewn out of a single block of stone and very slightly ornamented on the exterior.

The height is $28\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

The length 23 „

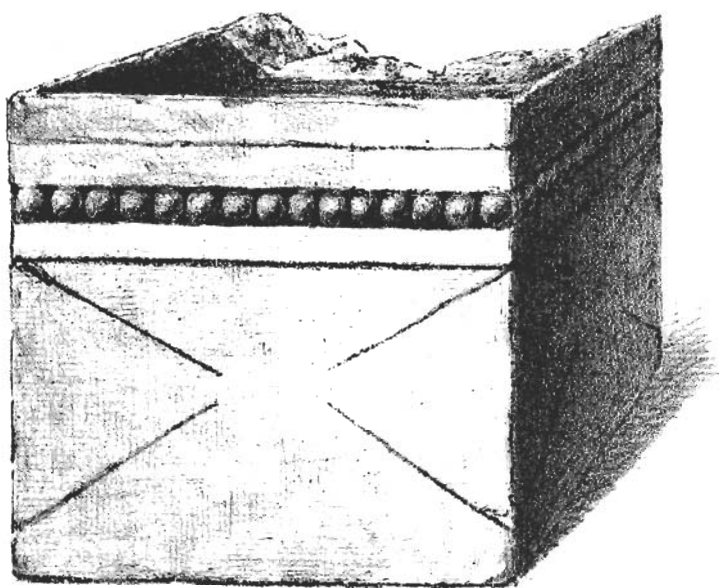
And breadth 22 „

and it is hollowed with a square basin, nearly 13 inches deep.

The upper portion of the surface is divided into four bands, each about 2 inches broad, and the third of these is ornamented with circular pellets, which run round the faces. The lower portion has lines converging to a point, but which do not meet. The tooling is rude, and gives the impression of a very early date (*see Plate IV.*)

Having carefully examined this Font, I am inclined to think it has no characteristics of a Roman altar, but is a very early Christian Baptismal Font. The cubical form is totally different from the ordinary form of a Roman altar, which is usually about 4ft. in height, and about 1 ft. 4 in. in width, and consists of a plain squared shaft, with base and capital, like a short stunted column. On the top is the Focus, usually with a round scroll on each side—forming the side ornaments of a projecting capital.

On the Front Face is the dedicatory inscription, and often on the sides are carved, in relief, the sacrificial instruments, and sometimes a figure of the victim. Many instances of this may be



Font in Staunton Church.
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

seen in the engravings of the "Lapidarium Septentrionale," by Dr. Collingwood Bruce, and in his work on the Roman Wall; other instances may be given, as the Roman altars found in Bath. The form sometimes varies¹ and takes a more elongated figure, but is never cubical. It is sometimes circular, but this form, as far as I am aware, has not been found in Britain. All these forms vary essentially from the cubical form of the Staunton font.

The Norman Fonts are often cubical in shape. These are represented in Mr. Paley's work on Baptismal Fonts (London: John Van Voorst, 1844), which will help to shew that the plain cubical form of the Staunton Font is much more in keeping with the early Norman font than with the supposed Roman altar. Two may be particularly mentioned, one at Aston-le-Walls, Northamptonshire, another at Fincham, Norfolk. When the height is sufficient these cubical fonts stand on the floor, being raised upon a single step; in other cases they are placed upon stone pillars, or on a single massive short column.

There is every reason to believe that the Stone Font in Staunton Church is of very early date, and of very primitive workmanship. There is no reason why it may not be pre-Norman; and as it bears no distinctive Saxon characteristics it might even go back to a still earlier period.

Mr. Paley remarks that "a rude block of stone hollowed out at the top, with scarcely a moulding or a particle of sculpture upon it, requires a practical eye to guess at its probable antiquity. For it is manifest that the date of the church in which it may be placed is the most unsafe and unconvincing evidence that can be followed in deciding that of the font. The sanctity rightly and reasonably attached to the consecrated instrument of a Holy Sacrament, caused the careful preservation of fonts unchanged by centuries of rebuilding and alteration. Thus we cannot doubt that a considerable number of fonts now exist in England wherein the Saxon infant received the waters of salvation from the hand of that ancient priest whose bones, for aught we know, may moulder under the pavement of a church re-constructed on its original

¹ See *Aquæ Solis*, p. 48 and p. 52.

foundations six centuries after his death."¹ I am not acquainted with the early Ecclesiastical History of Staunton Parish, and perhaps little is known of it; the font, however, proves it of very early date.²

Some few fonts in England lay claim to be British-Saxon, though if we may rely upon Mr. Paley's assertion that "we know from Bede that stone fonts were not used in his time,"³ we must not expect to find many of them.

For this assertion, attributed to Bede, he gives no reference, nor have I been able to find it in his writings.⁴

The font at Deerhurst, in Gloucestershire, has been supposed to be Saxon,⁵ but some of the ornamentation leads us to believe it is of later date.

The curious sculptures on the font in Kirkburn Church, near Driffield, Yorkshire⁶ have been thought to be Saxon, but this is very uncertain, as it may be also regarded as very early Norman: The font, also, in Winston Church, County of Durham, has been considered to be Saxon, and remains of undoubted Saxon date have been dug up in the churchyard, but no certain date can be ascribed to this font. The font in Penmon Church, Anglesey, is also very ancient. Here we might expect to find very early fonts. The form is cubical, and tapers upward, having a panelled ornament somewhat of a classical character, but certainly not mediæval, and more probably of pre-Norman date.⁷

It will probably be most safe to regard the Staunton Font as of uncertain date, but certainly not later than early Norman times.

¹ See Illustration of Bap. Fonts. Introduction pp. 9-10.

² I am informed that Roman remains have been found in Staunton parish, which probably gave rise to the idea that the Church Font was Roman.

³ See Note, Paley's B. F., p. 10.

⁴ In Bede's Eccl. Hist. : C. xiv., speaking of Paulinus and his work among the Bernicians, Bede observes "for as yet Oratories, or *Fonts*, could not be made in the early infancy of the Church in *those parts*;" but this does not shew that they were not general afterwards.

⁵ See Journal of British Archæol. Association, Vol. I., pp. 65 and 250.

⁶ See Journal of British Archæol. Association, Vol. VII., p. 38.

⁷ See Archæol. Journal, Vol. I., p. 122.