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**On the Saxon Baptismal Font in Deerhurst Priory Church, with
notes upon other Early Fonts**

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ON THE SAXON
BAPTISMAL FONT IN DEERHURST PRIORY CHURCH,
WITH NOTES UPON OTHER EARLY FONTS,
By ALFRED E. HUDD, F.S.A.

ALTHOUGH this very ancient and beautiful font has been more than once mentioned in *Archæological Journals* as being one among the many objects of antiquarian interest still to be seen in the little Gloucestershire village of Deerhurst, it has not, I think, hitherto met with the attention it deserves from all who take an interest in the subject of early art, and Celtic or Saxon ornament.

This may or may not be, as it has been described by one antiquary, "the oldest ornamented font in this country,"¹ but there can be little doubt, I think, that it dates from pre-Norman times, and may therefore be called, as it is designated in the title of this paper, a Saxon font. In this connection the term "Saxon" seems to me more appropriate than the now more usual "Primitive Romanesque," though the latter, as applied to architectural works in this and other countries, which are more or less founded upon Roman models, is perhaps the best designation that can be used; but, on the subject of *English Art and Ornament of the centuries preceding the Norman invasion*, the term Romanesque seems hardly applicable, the Saxons having mainly derived their beautiful style of art design, not from Rome, but from their early Celtic predecessors in Britain and Ireland.

The subject of pre-Norman Baptismal Fonts seems to be one upon which very little is known, so little in fact that it is even doubted by some antiquaries whether the Saxons used stone fonts in their churches. Mr. M. H. Bloxam, in the last edition of his "*Principles of Gothic Architecture*,"² says:—"We have no fonts

¹ *Grammar of Ornament*, 1868 edition, p. 93.

² 1882 edition, Vol. II., p. 19.

which from their details we can clearly ascribe to the Saxon era." The late Mr. J. H. Parker, in his "Glossary of Architecture,"¹ wrote:—"No fonts exist which can reasonably be supposed to be Saxon, but of Norman date they are very numerous." In his introduction to the beautiful work,² published by Van Voorst, in 1844, Mr. F. A. Paley, the Hon. Sec. of the Cambridge Camden Society, expressed quite a contrary opinion—"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 the ancient priest," &c. "Most frequently, however," continues this writer, "the rude unshapely font of this era was replaced in later times by one of costly sculpture and profuse religious decoration, and thus we cannot find a great number of examples of decidedly earlier date than the Norman era." Unfortunately none of the few remaining fonts which Mr. Paley considered to be of Saxon date are named by him: he merely remarks that "while Norman fonts are common, earlier examples are but seldom found," which seems to imply that some such were known to him.

The late Mr. Thomas Wright, F.S.A., in a paper upon Saxon Architecture,³ states that there is in the British Museum Library a manuscript of undoubted Saxon date, in which are represented "several figures of fonts, all of one form, a plain basin on a shaft, somewhat resembling an egg-cup." I have recently most carefully examined this manuscript,⁴ but, though it may seem somewhat presumptuous on my part to question the accuracy of so learned an antiquary on a subject with which he was so well acquainted, I cannot help feeling doubtful whether any of the figures referred to by Mr. Wright were intended to represent Baptismal Fonts, nor have I yet been able to discover any such representation either in English or Irish MSS., or sculptures, of earlier date than the 11th century. The cup-shaped objects mentioned above frequently occur in early representations

¹ Gloss. Arch., 4th edition, p. 169 (A.D. 1845).

² Illust. of Baptismal Fonts, Int. p. 10.

³ Archæological Journal, Vol. I., p. 34.

⁴ B.M. Cott. MS., Claud. B. iv.

of the birth of our Lord, or of the various saints, patriarchs, &c., but, so far as my observation has gone, they are not to be found in any Saxon illustration of the rite of baptism. In D'Agincourt's *History of Art*,¹ several font-like objects are figured from early sculptures, ivory carvings, MSS., &c., but not in connection with baptism. Among the subjects thus represented are Noah's Ark, the Nativity, the well at Samaria, the martyrdom of St. Salome, etc.

There is in the British Museum a Latin Psalter² of the 11th century, in which are many interesting illustrations of Saxon character. One of these represents the baptism of an infant, and shows the priest holding the child in his arms, attended by four acolytes or assistants, who hold in their hands what may be either long candles or staves. On the other side of the font is a woman with three children. The font itself, which is the earliest representation I have yet seen, is of the cup-like form, much more ornamented in design than most of those above mentioned, reminding one of the sham-classic apologies for fonts which were in use in many churches before the late Gothic revival, such as the one still retained, though not used, in Long Ashton Church, near Bristol.³ A somewhat similar font, though larger, is figured in a representation⁴ of the baptism by immersion of the mother of Beckett, c. A.D. 1190, but it seems hardly probable that fonts of this character could have been in general use in the 11th or earlier centuries.

It should, however, be mentioned that some few cup-shaped fonts, more or less resembling the objects figured in the illuminated manuscripts, still remain in old churches. Respecting these the late Rev. W. Phelps, F.S.A.,⁵ wrote:—"The Danish Fonts are goblet shaped; some few of this form are to be found in our oldest churches, and agree in form and detail with those given by Wormius, in his *Danish Antiquities*." Cup-shaped fonts remain in the churches at Chalk, Kent; Holt, Worcestershire; Mevagissey

¹ *History of Art by its Monuments* (1847).

² Harl. MS. 603, fol. 14.

³ Illustrated in Rutter's *Delineations of N.W. Somerset*, Pl. 15, fig. 4.

⁴ Royal MS. 2. B. vii. *Old England*, fig. 508.

⁵ *Hist. Somerset*, Vol. I., p. 187.

and Stratton, Cornwall; Plymstock, Devonshire; Sapcote, Leicestershire, &c., and are figured in the volume of "Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts"¹ above mentioned. None of these, however, appear from their mouldings to be of either Danish or Saxon date, but belong probably to late Norman times, from the end of the 11th century to late in the 12th. Fourteenth century cup-shaped fonts are common both in England and on the Continent.

Mr. W. Nelson Cote says:²—"The earliest pictorial representation of the rite of baptism we have found is in a manuscript of the ninth century, in the library of La Minerva, at Rome. It is entitled *Benedictis Fontis*. It is one of the oldest illustrated manuals of Baptism in existence, and prescribes trine immersion." The font represented in this picture is not unlike some of those still to be found in the early Baptisteries of northern Italy, *quatrelobed* in shape, and large enough for the total immersion of several adults at one time. It is not likely that such large fonts were ever used in England. We know from Bede³ that it was usual in early days in this country to baptize all converts, as in the apostolic period, by immersion in rivers, lakes, or springs. Thus it is stated that Paulinus baptized at York,⁴ in a wooden church built for the purpose, King Edwin of Northumbria, with all his nobility, and a large number of the people. A little later it is recorded that, at Adgefrin, Paulinus was fully occupied for thirty-six days in catechising and baptizing the people resorting from all villages and places in the neighbourhood, and, when instructed, "he washed them with the water of absolution in the river Glen which is close by." Also "he baptized in the river Swale, which runs by the village of Cataract,"—(Catterick, near Richmond, Yorkshire, the Roman Cataractonium), "for as yet oratories or fonts could not be made, in the infancy of the church in those parts." This statement of Bede's seems to have been taken by some writers to imply that

¹ This work is frequently called (*e.g.*, Transactions Vol. VIII., p. 153) "Paley's Fonts," because a preface was written for it by Mr. F. A. Paley. The editorial notice, however, on p. 5, is signed T.C.

² Archaeology of Baptism, London, 1826, p. 127.

³ Bede Eccles. Hist. Bohn's edition, Book II., ch. xiv.

⁴ On Christmas Day, A.D. 627.

in his time (8th century) baptismal fonts were not in general use in churches, but it seems only to refer to the converts of Paulinus and other early missionaries.¹ In the Vatican Library, at Rome, there is an ancient MS.² in which St. Sylvester is represented as baptizing a youth by immersion in a stone font, circular in shape and without ornament. It is probable that many of the early fonts were not unlike the one there represented, and that some of these remain still in use, having been more or less altered in shape and ornamented in later times. This is probably the case with the very interesting font in the church of St. Martin, Canterbury, which was said to be of the time of St. Augustine (c. 600) though its sculptured ornamentation seems to be Norman work. There is a very early looking font, not unlike in general form and character the Deerhurst example, in the church at Morville, Shropshire, which is figured in the *Archæological Journal*.³ In his *Antiquities of Shropshire*, Vol. I., the Rev. R. W. Eyton states that there was a collegiate foundation at Morville in Saxon times, and thinks the font may possibly be "a relique of that age." At Linley Church, in the same county, is another early font, resembling that at Morville, but rather later looking in its style of ornamentation.⁴ Both have cable mouldings, and, as much of the architecture in both churches is of late Norman character, it is probable that the fonts belong to the same period: there is nothing of the special Celtic or Saxon character in their design such as we have at Deerhurst. There are some divergent spirals of the S. form on the large Norman font in Bromyard Church, Herefordshire. A tub-shaped font, ornamented with sculptured interlaced work, remains, standing on the ground without a supporting pedestal, in Denton Church, but is probably of early Norman date, as is the jar-like, inscribed font at Little Billing, Northamptonshire.⁵

The very curiously inscribed font at Bridekirk, Cumberland, which used to be considered an undoubted Saxon work, is now

¹ See paper by Rev. H. M. Scarth, *Transactions*, Vol. v., p. 69.

² v. *Codex Greek*: also figured by Mr. Cote, in *Arch. of baptism*.

³ *Arch. Journal*, Vol. XII., p. 209, fig. 1.

⁴ *Id.*, p. 209, fig. 2.

⁵ *Illust. B. Fonts*, Pl. I.

supposed to have been made about A.D. 1150-70, by Richard, the architect of Norham Castle.¹ There is a cast of it at South Kensington.

The oldest baptismal font at present in use in England is doubtless that now in Chester Cathedral, but it is not a native production, having been brought to England a few years since from North Italy. It is a beautiful work of art, and probably dates from the 6th or 7th century.

A stone object, somewhat resembling the upper part of the Deerhurst font, is represented in an ancient MS. in the British Museum,² the ornamental decoration with which it is covered consisting entirely of spirals.³ This represents, however, not a baptismal font, but a sculptured stone well cover, such as one often sees in North Italy, and of some of which plaster casts are in the South Kensington Museum. This illustration, which is copied in Knight's *Old England*,⁴ is of interest, since it shews that these ornamental well covers were used in England in the 10th century.

It is quite possible that the so-called "Saxon Font" in South Hayling Church, Hampshire, which, according to Longeroft,⁵ "was found in 1827, in a shallow well in the south parish," may have been a Saxon well-cover, rather than a baptismal font. As described and figured by Mr. J. Harris,⁶ this interesting relic, when discovered, consisted of a square block of limestone, measuring 2ft. 3ins. at the top, having a large hole at the bottom which permitted the water to flow in from the spring, and a smaller hole at the side, allowing it to escape into the adjacent pond. All four faces are ornamented with geometrical figures of early character, among which divergent spirals are clearly visible.

Have we here an explanation of the reason why Saxon stone fonts are so seldom found in ancient churches? Was it the

¹ Stephens' *Runic Monuments of Scandinavia and England*, Vol. III. pp. 222, 223. ² Cotton MS. Nero, c. iv.

³ In a modern Japanese drawing, reproduced in the *Magazine of Art*, Vol. VI., 261, the waves of a river are represented by spirals very like these

⁴ *Old England*, Vol. I. fig. 297. ⁵ *Biog. Acc't. of the Hund. Bosmere*

⁶ *Journal British Archaeological Association*, (1886). Vol. 42, p. 63, and Pl. 7.

custom in pre-Norman times to baptize outside the church, in holy wells or streams, and not, on ordinary occasions, within the walls of the sacred buildings. In another Cotton MS. which represents the consecration of a Saxon church,¹ two curious tub-like objects appear in the foreground, which may possibly be baptismal fonts; both are apparently made of staves of wood roughly bound together, and one at least seems to be full of water. Wooden fonts were certainly used in England in early times, as they still are, I believe, by the Eastern Church in Russia, and elsewhere.² The font in Chobham Church, Surrey, is formed of wood, lined with lead; there is a plain octagonal oak font at Efenechtyd, Denbighshire; a rudely-fashioned object formed from the trunk of a tree, and supposed to have been used as a font in primitive times, is preserved in the museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. A wooden font, found in a bog at Dinas Mowddwg, Merionethshire “formed of a massy piece of knotty oak, rude on the sides as in a state of nature, the top and bottom levelled seemingly with the axe,” is figured in the *Archæological Journal* for 1856, where an account is given of it by Mr. W. W. Wynne, M.P., who says: “In the early days of Christianity Fonts were not confined to churches. They were usually kept in private houses, and sometimes in public places in the open air. Out of tenderness to infants they were afterwards removed into the porch, and finally into the church itself.” No authority is given for this statement by the writer. In the very curious representation given by Lacroix in his *Moyen Age, Vie Religieuse*, fig. 178 of the baptism “*des Saxons vaincus par Charlemagne*, from a 15th century MS., the two Saxon Kings kneel in shallow wooden tubs, dressed only in their golden crowns, while the priest recites the baptismal office. In the back ground are eight similar tubs, filled with water, to which eight captives of lesser rank, perfectly nude, are being conducted by priests and acolytes. A church and monastery appear beyond. The sponsors, Charlemagne and his officers, stand near the priests.

¹ Reproduced in Knight's *Old England*, Vol. I. fig. 215.

² Fonts of stone, or of wood—*lapidareum vel lignum*—were ordered to be used in Scotland by the Provincial Synod, A.D. 1225. Wilkins Concill, 623. *Archæologia*, XI., p. 122.

This picture reminds one of a somewhat similar event which took place in the year 878, near Langport, Somerset, where "Guthrum, the King of the Pagans (Danes), with thirty of his principal warriors, came to King Alfred at a place called Aller, near Athelney, and there the King receiving him as his son by adoption, raised him up from the font of holy baptism, and gave him the name of Athelstan." ¹

The very rude and primitive-looking font in the church at Staunton, Gloucestershire, figured in our Transactions,² may also be of Anglo-Saxon date, as its one little band of ornament—which, according to Sir John Maclean, is "similar to that on the abacus of a Norman capital in the church of English Bicknor"—³ may have been an addition of much later date.

It will be seen from the above remarks that we are unable to gather much information as to the nature and appearance of Saxon baptismal fonts from representations given in early drawings or sculptures, but if we may judge from the few specimens of stone fonts which still remain, to which a pre-Norman origin can reasonably be assigned, they differed as much in shape and character in pre-Norman times as they did in later periods. From the earliest times till the 15th century, among the hundreds of baptismal fonts that remain in our churches, so great is the variety of form and ornament that hardly two can be found alike in all particulars. It has been left for the 19th century workers to imitate instead of design, and it is now no unusual thing to find an entirely new copy of a baptismal font which the original designer probably carved with his own hands, and "out of his own head," some six or seven centuries ago. Some few instances may be named. The beautiful font in the Temple Church, London, is a good modern copy of one of late Norman date, in Alphington Church, Devonshire. The "Norman" font in All Saints' Church, Bristol, is a poor copy of that in Thornbury Church, Gloucestershire.⁴ The font now in use in Christchurch Priory Church, Hampshire, is a recent copy of the old one, fragments of which are still preserved in the church.

¹ Chron. Florence of Worc. A.D. 878. ² Vol. v., Pl. iv. ³ Id. p. 28.

⁴ The Thornbury font is figured in Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts, l. 18.

There has, however, been an immense improvement of late years both in the design and construction of baptismal fonts, and in the treatment of those of ancient date which had not been entirely destroyed. It seems hardly possible that less than half a century since the following statement could have been made of the then state of things in a christian country:—"A correspondent in the *Church Intelligencer*, No. 63, who, in 1842, visited upwards of fifty churches between London and Lancashire, found the fonts generally in a miserable state. In six churches only was the font itself actually used. There were substitutes of all kinds, in one case a tea-cup. The font represented at p. 92, was used, as I am informed, as a substitute for a tub to catch rain water, but has been now properly replaced within the walls of the Parish Church of Youlgrave, Derbyshire.¹

The substitution of basins, &c , for fonts seems to have been an innovation of long standing, as may be seen from an injunction of Bishop Wren, A.D. 1636, to be observed in his diocese of Norwich,² "That the font at baptism be filled with clear water, and no dishes, pails, or basins be used in it, or instead of it."

The first account published of the Deerhurst font was in the year 1845, when a drawing of the upper portion or bowl of the font was exhibited at one of the early meetings of the then newly established British Archæological Association. The drawing had been sent by the late Mr. W. H. Gomonde of Cheltenham, with a letter, in which he said that the font had been "kept in a farm-yard many years; perhaps in the time of the Reformation, or in that of Cromwell, it was ejected from the church," and that he was afraid it would be no more seen, "as I hear it has been sold for the sum of £6, and carried away I know not where."³ Fortunately, however, it had fallen into good hands. One month before Mr. Gomonde's letter was read in London, Dr. Samuel Wilberforce had accepted the Deanery of Westminster, which he

¹ Markland's Remarks on English Churches, p. 91, note and fig. p. 92.

² Bloxam's Principles of Gothic Architecture, 1882 edtn., Vol. II., p. 19, note.

³ Journal British Archæological Association, Vol. I., p. 65.

a.



— FONT. —
DEERHURST CHURCH.

a. From Elmstone.

held till the following October,¹ when he became Bishop of Oxford. As Dean of Westminster, and one of the vice-presidents, Dr. Wilberforce took part in the meeting of the Archæological Institute at Winchester, in September, 1845, and delivered an address on "The Nature and Value of Archæology," which is printed in the Winchester volume of the Institute. (Introduction pp. 5-13).

The following account of the modern history of the font has been given to me by the vicar (the Rev. Geo. Butterworth).² "Its return to Deerhurst came about in this way. Miss Strickland, of Apperley Court, discovered in the year 1870, in a garden close to the Severn, a mile-and-a-half from Deerhurst Church, an upright carved stone, used as a kind of rustic ornament to the garden. It fortunately struck her that the ornamentation of the stone exactly resembled that of the font, and that it was probably the stem of the ancient font, the bowl of which was, at that time, in Longdon Church. Miss Strickland brought me round to her opinion, and we then asked Longdon to give us up our old font; Longdon most graciously complied, Miss Strickland giving in exchange a perfectly new font. I suppose it will always be matter of opinion whether or not the bowl and stem belong properly to each other. As they seem to fit each other, it would be very singular if there were no old connection between them, the ornamentation being so nearly the same on both, and so remarkable, but it is not *exactly* the same, as on the stem a *small portion* of pattern is discoverable, which does not show on the bowl. The scroll pattern on both is, I believe, identically the same. . . . Whether the pattern of the rim and lower portion of the bowl is more modern than the spiral pattern, as some think, I cannot tell."

It will be seen from the illustration (*Plate VIII.*) that the font, as it at present stands in Deerhurst Church, consists of three portions, each of which is formed of a single block of stone: 1, the upper portion or bowl; 2, the pedestal; and 3, the base or step.

1. *The Bowl.*—This was the only portion figured in the Archæological Association Journal, from Mr. Gomonde's drawing, and

¹ Ashwell's *Life of Bishop Wilberforce*, p. 261.

² See also *Gloucestershire Notes and Queries*, Vol. II., p. 110.

consists of a block of rather coarse-grained oolite (probably from the neighbouring Cotteswold Hills) circular, or rather tub-shaped in form, the surface being almost entirely covered with ornamental sculpture.

The only remark respecting the font published in the account of the meeting of the British Archæological Association, in addition to the brief extracts from Mr. Gomonde's letter, is as follows: being, I presume, the opinion of Mr. Thomas Wright, F.S.A., to whom the letter seems to have been addressed:—"The ornamentation is uncommon, and apparently of an early character;" with which probably the subject would have been consigned to oblivion, had not the report of the meeting and the small illustration fallen into the hands of a gentleman who had given much attention to the subject of early art, Mr. J. O. Westwood, who wrote to the Association expressing a hope that the influence of that learned body might be exerted to rescue the font from the destruction that appeared to await it. Mr. Westwood, in this letter, gave an excellent account of the ornamentation of the font which, unfortunately, he had not at that time examined, his remarks being founded upon the small woodcut illustration above-mentioned. Although this engraving gives a fairly good general idea of the appearance of the portion of the font it represents, it is not sufficiently accurate to be made use of for the purpose of critical comment upon the minute details of the ornamentation. As, however, Mr. Westwood's description of the font is by far the best that has been published, and as it has been quoted from by most recent writers on the subject it is here given.

"This font, from the style of its ornamental carving, appears to me to be far more ancient than any other font hitherto represented. The peculiar ornament of the body of the font—that of spiral lines running off and conjoining with other similar lines, forming an endless pattern—is especially Irish, and is found in the finest of the most ancient illuminated Irish copies of the Gospels, and in those which were executed in England, under the influence of the Irish Missionaries. Thus it is found in all the illuminated pages of the Gospels of St. Chad and Mac Regol,¹ and

¹ In Bodleian Library, said to date from about A.D. 820.

in the Gospels of Lindisfarne or Durham Book ;¹ but I do not recollect having seen it in manuscripts known to be more recent than the 9th century. It also occurs on the Irish stone carved crosses. As therefore, in Saxon manuscripts more recent than the 9th century, we find no traces of this style of ornament, I think we are justified in regarding this font as the one existing at Deerhurst in the time of venerable Bede himself. The ornaments round the base and rim of the font are, however, of a totally different style, and I should conceive them to be after work of the 11th century. Such flowing arabesques *as they are represented to be*, are never found drawn in MSS. which have the spiral pattern.”²

It will be seen from the illustration (*Plate VIII.*) that the pattern on the body of the font consists, as described by Mr. Westwood, of “spiral lines running off and conjoining with other spirals, forming an endless pattern.” We will consider this portion of the ornamentation first, leaving the border patterns till later. It may, however, be as well to state at once that in the opinion of the present writer these borders are of the same age as the spirals ; the whole sculpture seems to be of the same style of workmanship, and appears to him entirely unlike any work of the 12th century he has seen, both in its design and execution.

In a most valuable article on “Celtic Ornament,” written by Mr. Westwood, some years later than his letter above quoted, he says :—³“The most characteristic of all the Celtic patterns is that produced by two or three spiral lines starting from a fixed point, their opposite extremities going off to the centres of coils formed by other spiral lines. . . . Instances in metal-work of this pattern occur in several objects found in Ireland, . . . and in different parts of England. It is more rarely found in stone-work, the only instance of its occurrence in England, as far as we are aware, being on the font of Deerhurst Church. Bearing in mind that this ornament does not appear in MSS. executed in England after

¹ Bibl. Cott., Nero D. iv.

² Journal British Archaeological Association, Vol. I., p. 250.

³ Article on “Celtic Ornament” in Owen Jones’s “Grammar of Ornament,” (1868 edtn.) p. 93.

the 9th century, we may conclude that this is the oldest ornamented font in this country." The same writer in a paper on "Early British, Saxon, and Irish Ornamentation," published in the *Archæological Journal*,¹ says:—"It is worthy of notice that I have not found any instance of this spiral ornament on any of the carved stone crosses of Wales." It occurs on several of those of Scotland, but the only instance in England, known to him, was the Deerhurst font.

Mr. J. Romilly Allen, F.S.A., Scot., in his "Notes on Celtic Ornament," of Scotland,² says: "As regards Celtic stone-work the evidence of dated examples goes to show that the forms of ornament were developed in the MSS. first, and applied to stone-work later, but there is really no reason why some of the sculptured stones may not be at least as old as the Lindisfarne Gospels—that is to say, of the 7th century." The same writer states,³ "The chief characteristics of the Celtic style of art in Christian times are as follows: namely, first and foremost, the practice of arranging the ornaments in panels, each complete in itself and separated from the next, and entirely surrounded by a marginal frame. . . . These panels are filled in either with the geometrical forms of ornament already referred to, or with figures of dragons, &c. . . . In later times foliaceous scroll work is also added."

Dr. Joseph Anderson,⁴ says:—"The most distinctive characteristic of Celtic art is the absence of foliage. . . . It had reached its culminating point before a single foliaceous scroll makes its appearance."

Mr. Allen⁵ gives an interesting account of the geometrical forms of ornament which occur upon Celtic works of art of the early Christian period, which he divides into three classes, namely (1) interlaced work; (2) key patterns; and (3) spiral patterns. Of the latter he says,¹ "There are, broadly speaking, two distinct forms of spiral patterns used in Celtic art: (1) where the band of

¹ *Arch. Journal*, Vol. x., p. 300.

² *Proc. Soc. Antq. Scot.* Vol. 1883-4, pp. 253-308.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁴ *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, 2nd series, p. 82.

⁵ *Proc. Soc. Antq., Scot.*, 1883-4, p. 253-308.

which the spiral is formed gradually expands into a trumpet-shaped end ; (2) where the band of which the spiral is formed remains the same breadth throughout its whole length. The first of these forms is the earlier of the two, and is copied directly from the metal work of Pagan times."

The Deerhurst spirals belong to the second and later of these classes. On page 297, of the same work, Mr. Allen figures three out of the eight panels of this font from a rubbing taken by himself, and on the next page he says the pattern is "founded on squares set parallel, the spirals being quadruple, and joined by C shaped curves."

The question of the origin of the divergent spiral ornament, and of Irish or Celtic art, though a subject of much interest, is not that of the present paper. Much interesting and valuable information as to its early history and development will be found in the works of Professor J. O. Westwood, Mr. Owen Jones, Dr. Joseph Anderson, Miss Stokes, the Rev. G. F. Browne, Mr. Romilly Allen and other writers, most of whom favour the national or patriotic view that Celtic design was an original product of our islands, though "whether the Irish in the first instance received their styles of ornament from the early British christians, or whether it was in Ireland that they originated, we cannot tell," says Mr. Westwood.¹ Various forms of spirals are in use all over the world as ornaments, and can be traced back almost to the dawn of art amongst pre-historic races. Of the diverging spirals the S form is much more common and general than the C form, such as we have at Deerhurst, but a design very similar to the latter is given by Mr. Owen Jones, from an ancient Egyptian tomb, which carries back this specially "Celtic" design to a period long before that of the earliest of the Celtic missionaries. It has been suggested by Mr. Westwood³ that Byzantium and the East may have "afforded the ideas which early Celtic christian artists developed in the retirement of their monasteries," as it is known

¹ Grammar of Ornament, Celtic, p. 95.

² Grammar of Ornament, Egyptian, pl. x., fig. 15.

³ Ibid Celtic Ornament, p. 95.

that the British and Irish missionaries were constantly travelling to the Holy Land and Egypt.

Diverging spirals of the C type, more or less resembling those on the bowl of the Deerhurst font, are figured by Dr. Anderson in his work on *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, from sculptured monuments in Scotland, at Rosemarkie, Drainie, Hilton of Cadbol, Monifieth, Shandwick, and St. Vigean's. This latter is especially interesting, 'as, in addition to some diverging spirals, it bears an inscription in the Celtic language which was read by the late Sir James Simpson as DROSTEN : IPE VORET ETT FORCUS, which he translated thus :—"The stone of Drosten the son of Voret, of the race of Fergus," and he identified this Drost as a Pictish king who was slain in the year 729.¹ Dr. Anderson does not accept this reading of the inscription, which he thinks may be of later date. This "Drosten's Stone" is also interesting in connection with our present subject as one of its sides is sculptured with a running scroll, described by Dr. Anderson² as "a foliaceous scroll with lanceolate leaves, and a triplet of fruit alternately on either side of the wavy stem," which reminds one somewhat of the scroll work at Deerhurst, though it is certainly not intended to represent the same plant. It seems to me that the shrub represented in the St. Vigean's monument is one not often found in sculptured stone, though I believe there is a 14th century example in the choir of Bristol Cathedral; namely, the *Viscum Album*, or mistletoe.

Returning to the ornamentation of the Deerhurst font we will now consider the nature of these scroll-work borders. The presence on the Drosten stone of both the diverging spirals and scroll pattern shows that there are exceptions to Mr. Westwood's rule that the two are never found together in Celtic art, or at least it shows that they are occasionally found together in sculptured stone-work. Another very early example of scroll work, somewhat like that at Deerhurst, is on the two sides of the celebrated cross at Ruthwell, in Annandale, which was, according to its Runic inscription, made by Caedmon, who died c. 680 A.D. These are figured by Dr. Anderson,³ and described as "running scrolls

¹ Scot. in *Early Christian Times*, 2nd Ser. pp. 198-200.

² *Ibid.* p. 194, fig. 125. ³ *Ibid.*, figs. 142, 143, and pp. 238, 244n.

each representing a vine, with its branches alternately recurved, and bearing grapes in symmetrical clusters, a bird or beast lodging in each of the branches and feeding on the fruit. The vine is the most ancient subject of Christian art. It appears in the catacombs," &c. Now it has been supposed by Miss Butterworth, who has had every opportunity of studying the work at Deerhurst, and has taken special interest in the font, that the scrolls there represent vine branches, with "symmetrical clusters" of five grapes each. This opinion may be right, but I incline myself to the belief that what the sculptor intended to represent was a branch of wild rose, with leaves, flowers, and fruit, possibly the common "Trailing Dog rose" (*Rosa arvensis*), the stems of which are nearly destitute of thorns. In Britford Church, near Salisbury, there is an ancient archway decorated with Celtic or Saxon interlaced work, the borders of which much resemble the borders of the Deerhurst font. This interesting work, which is undoubtedly of Saxon date, is beautifully illustrated in the *Journal of the British Archæological Association*,¹ by Mrs. E. J. Goldney, where an account of the remains is given by Mr. H. J. F. Swayne, of Wilton, who has most kindly sent me a photograph of the ornament for comparison with the work at Deerhurst. It will be seen on comparing the design on *Plate VIII.*, with Mrs. Goldney's illustration, that the Britford scrolls, though they do not represent the same plant as those at Deerhurst, resemble the latter in several particulars, especially in the connecting links by which the sprays are united. Respecting these, Mr. T. S. Pope, in a paper on "the Architectural Remains of Deerhurst Priory Church,"² says: "The representation of the little connecting links, technically called, "garters," inclines me to think that it was copied from goldsmith's work, for which the Saxons were celebrated." Similar connecting links will be noticed in the ornamental scrolls on the sides of the Ruthwell Cross, and on the beautiful early cross in the churchyard at Bakewell, Derbyshire; this latter, though without foliaceous enrichments, and therefore of earlier character than the Deerhurst work, resembles the latter

¹ Vol. xxxii. p. 497.

² Proceedings Clifton Antiquarian Club (1885), Vol. I, p. 20.

in having some of the triangular spaces left by the curves of the alternate right and left spirals, filled in with a curious trefoil ornament.¹

It has been suggested that some of the Celtic and Saxon ornaments may have been imitated from Roman work. There can be little doubt but that the pilasters of the celebrated Couplet-window in the east wall of Deerhurst tower are either Roman, or imitated from Roman sculpture (*Pl. V.*) It is therefore possible that these scroll patterns may have been imitated by the pre-Norman workman from one of the Roman mosaic pavements, so many of which probably remained in the neighbourhood of Deerhurst at the time the font was made. The border of the great circle in the Woodchester pavement, not many miles south of Deerhurst, has scroll-work not very dissimilar, though much more foliaceous than the patterns on the font. A somewhat similar pattern is common on Samian ware.

It has been supposed by some writers that much of the Celtic ornament was derived from Roman work, but the fact that in Ireland, where the art attained its highest development, few if any Roman remains are to be found, is fatal to the theory.

II. *The Pedestal.* Some doubt has been expressed by at least one antiquary whose opinion on such subjects is worthy of our attention, as to whether the stone which now supports the bowl of the font at Deerhurst, really belongs to it. This suggestion appears to have originated with the Rev. G. Foster Browne, B.D., the President of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, from whom I received a letter about a year ago, in which he stated his opinion that the real pedestal of the font was preserved in a neighbouring church. He did not give any reasons, however, for his belief, and it was at that time quite new to me; it seems, however, to be still Mr. Browne's opinion, as appears from a report in the *Academy* for December 18th, 1886, of a recent meeting of the Cambridge Society, at which the President "showed an outline rubbing of the font (Deerhurst) and a fragment of a square stone support at Elmstone Hardwick, five or six miles on

¹ There is a beautiful engraving, by Le Keux, of this cross, in the *Archæol. Journal*, Vol. XI., p. 282.

the Cheltenham side of Deerhurst. These are covered with spirals of the C pattern, very carefully and elaborately drawn, and they are quite unlike any other sculptured stones in England. The font has above and below the panels of spirals a very graceful scroll, probably of a later pattern than those on the Ruthwell cross,¹ the Drosten stone at St. Vigeans, and other very early examples." Mr Browne thought that the theory of a previous speaker that some of the so-called "Saxon work" at Deerhurst was "a reproduction after the conquest of early patterns and details," met some of the difficulties peculiar to Deerhurst, but he could not dispute the Celtic character of the spiral work on the font, and could not conceive where the supposed copier could have found his originals in the twelfth century.

In an article on "Sculpture in Pictland,"² by the Rev. G. F. Browne, the author accepts the theory that the St. Vigeans stone "is presumably a memorial" of Drosten son of Voret, slain A.D. 729 and says, that many beautiful variations of this scroll occur on stones in the North of England, at a date quite as early as that named; the Ruthwell cross, as previously mentioned, belongs to the 7th century (c.665). Though the Deerhurst scroll work is probably of rather later date than these, it does not follow that we are therefore to attribute it to the 11th or 12th century; on the whole, it seems to me that in the absence of any pure Norman work in the church, we shall probably not be far wrong if we date the whole of the ornamental portions of the font, to the 9th or 10th century.

I have recently, by the kindness of the Vicar of Elmstone, been enabled to take rubbings and measurements of the three sculptured sides of the stone there, and, on the same day, to examine and compare the rubbings with the spirals of the Deerhurst font. The result is that I have come to the conclusion—though it is somewhat audacious on my part to offer an opinion which is at variance with that of one of our very first authorities on sculptured stones—that the Elmstone fragment never formed part of a font, and that the pedestal now at Deerhurst is in its right

¹ Scotland in Early Christian Times, 2nd Ser., pp. 232, 244n.

² Magazine of Art (1883) Vol. II. p. 19.

place. My reasons for these opinions are: 1st, that the spiral-work on the present pedestal at Deerhurst is more like that on the body of the font than are the Elmstone spirals, being enclosed in panels; 2nd, that it fits the upper part of the font much better than the Elmstone stone could ever have fitted it; 3rd, that the presence of the stone ornamented in a manner similar to the Deerhurst pattern is sufficiently accounted for by the fact, for which I am indebted to the Vicar, the Rev. Geo. Bayfield Roberts, that the church of Elmstone, or as it is called in Domesday Book "Almondeston"¹ was founded by the monks of Deerhurst, to whom the parish belonged. The stone is but a fragment, and has been much cut about, having been used, apparently, as a water stoup in the 14th or 15th century, when, probably, its corners were bevelled off, and a square hole cut in the top. It is, however, possible that it once formed part of a cross, and that the hole is original. The spiral patterns remain upon three of the four portions of the original faces of the stone, no ornament being visible on the fourth face.²

The patterns upon the pedestal at Deerhurst consist of divergent spirals exactly resembling those on the upper portion of the font, enclosed in similar panels, but separated from each other by panels ornamented with interlacing strapwork; this is so much worn that it is difficult to distinguish the exact design, but it is not unlike, I believe, work found on some of the stones with the spiral ornament in Scotland. The upper part of the pedestal is divided into seven panels, of which four contain the spiral ornaments. The lower portion has been cut down in a most curious manner, and now forms an octagonal stem, which is inserted into the step supporting the font. Whether this is original work, or was an alteration of the mediæval workmen, it is difficult to guess.

It has been thought by some that the pedestal should be reversed, so that the octagonal stem should support the eight panels of the bowl, but this would hardly be an improvement, I think, to the general effect of the font. Perhaps at the time this octagonal cutting was made the whole of the cut portion was inserted into the

¹ In Atkyns's *Glo'cestershire*, p. 225, it is called "Elmston." The present Vicar does not adopt the double name Elmstone-Hardwick, which, he says, is modern and unnecessary.

² See Plate VIII.

floor of the church. Mr. Butterworth informs me that before the parts were re-united, so far as he can recollect, both distal surfaces of the stem were plain and unbroken, as was also the surface of the bottom of the bowl, which fits the stem.

III. *The Step*.—The octagonal stone, upon which the font at present stands, has been in the church for some centuries, but is probably not nearly so ancient as the font itself. It supported, before the restoration of the Saxon Font, the curious nondescript font described by Mr. Buckler;¹ when the Saxon font was restored to Deerhurst, this old one was presented to the church at Castle Morton, Worcestershire, which happened to be in need of a font, and I believe it still remains there. Mr. Butterworth describes it as plain and unornamented, with an octagonal stem, probably of fourteenth or fifteenth century date, and he does not remember any “carved work” or “remains of scroll patterns in slight relief” with which Mr. Buckler imagines its surface to have been once covered. At the time Mr. Buckler visited Deerhurst, the Saxon Font was probably at Longdon, and so escaped his notice. I have not seen the font he described,² which then occupied the place of the present one in “the dark corner of the interior” of Deerhurst church, but if it belongs to the fourteenth century, when so much work was done at Deerhurst, it is probable that the much more beautiful font which preceded it, must then, for some incomprehensible reason, have been ejected from the church, and that neither the much abused men of the 16th nor of the 17th century were guilty of what all must look upon as an outrage on good taste if not a desecration. The step may also be of 14th or 15th century date.

In conclusion the following dimensions of the font, as it at present stands in Deerhurst church, may be of interest.

Total height without step (not including 4 or 5 ins. let into step)	3 ft. 5 ins.
Diameter across the top	2 ft. 4½ ins.

¹ Ante pp. 64, 65.

² There is an engraving of it in Lyson's Gloucestershire Antiquities, Pl. 52, fig. 8, which I am informed is rather a flattering portrait. It certainly does not agree with Mr. Buckler's description.

Diameter of interior of bowl	-	-	-	-	2 ft. 0 ins.
Depth	-	-	-	-	1 ft. 1 ins.
Depth of exterior	-	-	-	-	1 ft. 9 ins.
Greatest circumference of bowl	-	-	-	-	7 ft. 5 ins.

The interior of the bowl is not lined with lead, nor does it appear ever to have been so. It had not originally a hole at the bottom to drain off the water, which seems to have been drawn off at the side.

The County of Gloucester contains a fine series of pre-Reformation Baptismal Fonts, some few of which have been figured and described in our Transactions. Others have appeared in various archaeological publications, but the greater number, including some of considerable interest, remain, almost unknown, in our smaller country churches. It is to be hoped that many of these may find a place in our Journal, or still better that a complete record of the whole number may be undertaken by our Society.

