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The Gloucestershire Fonts

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THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE FONTS.

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PART I.

LEADEN BOWLS.

THERE are nine leaden fonts in Gloucestershire, and this is a large percentage for one county, seeing there are only thirty in the whole of England and Wales. These bowls are either circular or tub-shaped, and those of an earlier date possessed covers. Several still retain the markings to which the locks were attached, for by the constitution of Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury (A.D. 1236), fonts were required to be covered and locked.

Six of these leaden bowls were all made from the same mould. They belong to the churches at Frampton-on-Severn,¹ Lancaut,² Oxenhall, Sandhurst,³ Siston and Tidenham.³ The decoration upon these fonts is in *alto rilievo*, and consists of a band of foliage at the top (2 inches deep) and bottom (2½ inches deep). An arcade surrounds the bowl, containing alternately figures and scrolls, being thrice repeated. The two figures, which are doubtless intended to represent the Saviour, are vested in richly-ornamented robes, and are seated on thrones. The first holds a sealed book in the right hand, and the left is upraised in benediction; the second figure also raises the left hand in the act of blessing, but the right grasps a book which has had the seal removed from it.

The late Dr. Ormerod says: "The dress, and particularly the beards, of the figures, the decoration of the thrones, the ornamental foliage, and the scrolls, will more probably be

¹ The font is illustrated in the *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, vol. ii (1847), and in Bond's *Fountains and Font Covers*, p. 81.

² The font is illustrated in Bond's *Fountains and Font Covers.*, p. 82.

³ The fonts at Tidenham and Lancaut are illustrated in *Archæologia*, vol. xxix.

referred to the Saxon era. As far as the coarser execution will allow the comparison, they very much resemble the delineations given in the *Benedictional* of St. Æthelwold. The figure with the sealed book in particular resembles the representation of the Trinitas in that volume, excepting a difference in the composition and adaptation of the nimbus."¹ Dr. Ormerod was of opinion that these fonts² were constructed about the year 960 A.D. This is far too early a date to ascribe to them, and on careful examination of the arcade,³ it will be noticed that the shafts are richly adorned with chevron, cable, and sunk pellet mouldings, while the arches, capitals, bases and spandrels are all adorned with ornamentation. The figures, with their knees spread wide apart, may have deceived Dr. Ormerod, for he considered they belonged to the Anglo-Saxon period. The date which Dr. Ormerod assigned to these fonts is certainly a hundred, or possibly one hundred and fifty years too early, and we believe that Dr. Cox and Dr. Harvey are correct when they state, in their recent work on *English Church Furniture*,⁴ that these fonts are of Early Norman date, and belong to a period prior to 1100. Mr. Francis Bond, in his recent work on *Fonts and Font Covers* (p. 79), points out it is a leading principle in archaeology that an object must be dated, not by the evidence of early work, but by that of late work seen in it; and an art in which moulds are employed long goes on perpetuating ancient patterns. Mr. Francis Bond considers that these fonts are not likely to be earlier than the closing years of the twelfth or the early years of the following century, and in any case such a pre-Conquest date as has been assigned by Dr. Ormerod is quite out of the question.

The fonts at Lancut and Sandhurst are smaller than the

¹ See *Archæologia*, vol. xxiv, p. 87.

² Dr. Ormerod does not appear to have known of the fonts at Frampton-on-Severn, Oxenhall, Sandhurst and Siston, which are all in the same county.

³ The arcades are 9½ inches high and 5½ inches wide.

⁴ See *English Church Furniture*, by Cox and Harvey, p. 199. In their list of Norman fonts, on page 200, they omit the leaden bowls at Oxenhall, Siston and Sandhurst.

others, having only eleven and ten arcades respectively. Lancaut Church, which is situated on the banks of the River Wye, is now a ruin ; but the leaden bowl is carefully preserved by Sir William H. Marling, Bart., at Sedbury Park. As the bowl at Sandhurst has an uneven number of arcades, two of the scroll patterns come together.

It seems probable that these eleventh-century bowls were all cast from the same mould in the usual way. The sheet, with the decorated portion to the outside, would be bent into a tub-shaped vessel, as lead is such a malleable metal when not specially hardened with tin or antimony to any large extent. The joinings of the two parts would be covered with a seam. Some later leaden bowls possess two or even more seams, which indicate that they were made in either two or more pieces. The figures and ornaments are often facsimiles, and in these cases it is very probable that a single pattern was first carved in wood and then impressed on the sand mould as often as required. Mr. Francis Bond remarks that the practice was a common one in the cast-iron works of Sussex.

The font at Haresfield has been an unsolved puzzle for many years. It is painted a dark green colour, and this appears to have deceived some authorities, who have placed it down as an example of a bell-metal¹ font. I was permitted by the churchwardens to remove a small fraction of the metal, and on submitting it to chemical analysis, the fact is now established that the bowl is made of lead. The ornamentation has led to various conjectural dates being assigned to its construction. The bowl is adorned with twenty-two pointed arches having cusplings. These arches rest on shafts formed of some twenty-six beads. Round the centre and at the bottom of the bowl are bands of ornament composed of quatrefoils and triangles placed in squares. Mr. W. St. John Hope, M.A., Mr. Lawrence Weaver, F.S.A., Mr. Bligh Bond, and Dr. Alfred Harvey have come to the conclusion that this font is well in the Gothic period, and its construction may be assigned to the early years

¹ Bell-metal is an alloy of tin and copper—two parts of the first and eight parts of the second.

of the fourteenth century. The arches, the tracery, and the cusplings are most unlikely to be post-Gothic, while the bands of ornamentation round the base and centre are similar to many parapets of fourteenth-century work.¹ The buttoned shafts present the chief difficulty. Mr. W. St. John Hope considers the beading to be a plumber's trick, and Mr. Bligh Bond remarks: "As for the buttoned shafts, these also appear to me quite as likely to be characteristic of the earlier date, since we know that there are a good many instances of early woodwork (thirteenth and fourteenth century) which exhibit small shafts with turned cups and bands used as mullions; also the type of buttoned work on the Haresfield font seems much more like that seen on early furniture than that one observes as a seventeenth-century ornament." Mr. Francis Bond, however, is opposed to these views, and suggests that the bowl cannot be dated earlier than the seventeenth century. In his opinion the bowl in question betrays a post-Reformation character, when the spirit had departed from the art of the Gothic craftsmen. In support of this opinion he points out the inartistic way in which certain diagonal lines, well shown in the illustration, run right across the vertical shafts.²

The ornamentation of the circular leaden bowl at Slimbridge is divided into four compartments by small pilasters. Two cherubs with five-petalled rosettes above and pear-shaped ornamentation below adorn the eastern face. The western face has two cherubs, rosettes, the date 1664, and the initials "I.T." and "W.S." There is a fluted moulding at the top and bottom. The stone base has the date 1634 and the initials "R.B." and "A.P."

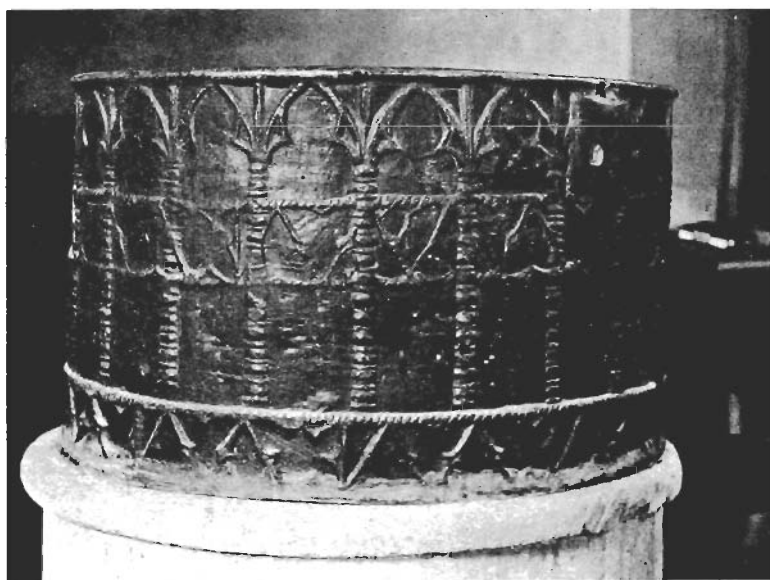
In the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Down Hatherley, is a leaden tub-shaped bowl. It is the smallest of these Gloucestershire leaden fonts, and is only 18½ inches in diameter and 12 inches in depth. It was constructed with two seams, and is decorated with two branches of foliage of the Renaissance

¹ Wells, St. Mary Redcliffe, St. Mary Magdalen (Taunton), etc.

² *Arch. Journ.*, vol. lxx, p. 336.



DOWN HATHERLEY.



HARESFIELD.



FRAMPTON-ON-SEVERN.



SLIMBRIDGE.

type ¹ in shallow relief, several stars and lozenges,² and three Tudor rosettes.³ At the bottom is a band known as Tudor cresting.⁴

APPENDIX.

LEADEN BOWLS.

	Diameter (Interior).	Depth (Exterior).	Remarks.
	Inches.	Inches.	
DOWN HATHERLEY (St. Mary the Virgin and Corpus Christi)	18½	12	Illustrated in Bond's <i>Fonts and Font Covers</i> , p. 87. The base has the date 1634; but the bowl belongs to the Tudor period.
FRAMPTON-ON- SEVERN (St. Mary the Virgin)	25½	22	Illustrated in <i>Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.</i> , vol. ii, 1847, and in Bond's <i>Fonts and Font Covers</i> , p. 81.
HARESFIELD (St. Peter) ..	22½	13¾	This bowl is now painted a dark green. Illustrated in Bond's <i>Fonts and Font Covers</i> , p. 86.
LANCAUT (St. James) ..	22	22	Illustrated in <i>Archæo- logia</i> , vol. xxix. The circumference at the bottom is 4½ in. less than at the top.
OXENHALL (St. Anne) ..	25½	22
SANDHURST (St. Mary the Virgin) ..	23½	22	The circumference at the bottom is 5 in. less than at the top. Illustrated in Bond's <i>Fonts and Font Covers</i> , p. 82.
SISTON (St. Anne) ..	25½	22
SLIMBRIDGE (St. John the Evan- gelist)	27	16	The font was constructed in 1664.
TIDENHAM (St. Mary the Virgin)	25½	22	Illustrated in <i>Archæo- logia</i> , vol. xxix.

¹ 8 in. by 6 in.² 5 in. by 3½ in.³ 8 in. by 5½ in.⁴ This font is illustrated in Bond's *Fonts and Font Covers*, p. 87.