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Gloucestershire Fonts. Part 4

by A. C. Fryer
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GLOUCESTERSHIRE FONTS.

PART IV.

(b) NORMAN.

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THIS paper continues the subject of Norman fonts, and we will consider nine bowls belonging to this period, varying in age from the last quarter of the eleventh century to the latter half of the twelfth century. Three are rectangular and six are cylindrical in form.

It is not often that an ancient font can be given an exact date, but the one at St. Briavels was evidently made about the year 1089. The beautiful south arcade in this church is known to have been built at this date,¹ and as the stone and dressing of both the arcade and font are identical, we have no hesitation in assigning the year 1089 as the probable date of this font. In the previous paper on Norman fonts attention was drawn to the unusual shape of the waist-band on the Eastington font, which retained the abnormal form of a shelf scalloped below. The waist-band on the font at St. Briavels is also a shelf, consisting of sixteen small scallops. It is quite unique and presents the appearance of a frill, and in fact it is so described in a paper written on this ancient church of Ledeneia Parva in our *Transactions* some years ago. The writer remarks that this font is worthy of notice, "with a frill moulding round the base of the bowl."²

Several of the more important features of the Norman

¹ See *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. ix., p. 74.

² In 1884 a paper was written on the Parish Church of St. Briavels by the Rev. William Taprell Allen, M.A.

church are faithfully reproduced in the fonts of that period, such as the string courses, the arcading of the aisle walls, whether external or internal, and the pier with its capital, base, plinth and spur. The capitals are either the Corinthianesque capital, the undivided cushion, and later the subdivided cushion or scalloped, while later still the water-leaf and the capital with the plantain leaf may be found. A fine example of the sub-divided cushion or scalloped capital may be seen in the church of Hanham Abbots. It is not known where the Abbot of Keynsham obtained his font, but he evidently brought it to Hanham when he built a church adjoining his summer residence about the year 1450. At the same date he placed a richly-carved Norman pillar-piscina in the sanctuary of his fifteenth-century church, and it is possible he may have brought both from Keynsham Abbey. From the latter part of the fourteenth century up to the Dissolution a very large number of fonts were made, and it is not at all improbable that some magnificent example of this period may have been presented to the abbey church of Keynsham. In that case the old Norman font would be available for the new chapel at Hanham Abbots. At the same date some reconstruction of choir or chapels may have been undertaken at the abbey church, and a wall-piscina being inserted, the old Norman pillar-piscina was therefore brought to the new church at Hanham. The spur or griffe was a favourite ornament with the Norman masons. They began to be common in the middle of the twelfth century, and were in vogue for about a hundred years. The four spurs found on the circular base of the font at Hanham Abbots have been considerably restored, and it is probable that they did not originally present quite such sharp angles as they now possess.

Two fragments belonging to a Norman font are built into the wall of the ancient church at Avening. One small, sadly-mutilated fragment (7 in. by 7 in.) indicates that it once formed a fraction of a rectangular stone ornamented with a

round-headed arch, supported by a pillar and a wall-bracket. The larger portion of this rectangular bowl is in the north wall of the nave, and forms part of the internal jamb of the north door. This fragment is sufficiently large (2 ft. $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 1 ft. $1\frac{3}{4}$ in.) to show that the bowl was originally $2\frac{3}{4}$ ft. in length, being $\frac{1}{2}$ ft. longer than the Norman bowl in St. Philip's Church, Bristol. Arcading was greatly in vogue during the Norman period, as it not only formed a pleasing adornment, but also provided a series of niches in which statues might be enshrined. The Avening font has an arcade of rudely-cut, round-headed arches, supported alternately on pillars, and wall-brackets containing three pairs of figures. Five figures still remain, and one circular pillar supporting the arcade has its capital and base. The apostles were so frequently sculptured on Norman fonts, that it is probable the bowl at Avening had six apostles on one face and six on another, while the other two faces would doubtless be ornamented in some other way.

Our *Transactions*¹ contain an extract from a report submitted to the rector and churchwardens of Avening, September 1st, 1888, by Mr. R. Herbert Carpenter, F.S.A., and Mr. B. Ingelow, architects, in which they state that "on the internal jamb is a curious sculptured stone, and it has been suggested by Fosbroke that the subject represented on it is Adam and Eve, symbolical of the Sacrament of Marriage; but on careful examination it is evident the stone is not in its original place, and that it has been cut at each end and used as a jamb stone for the inside of a doorway inserted in the fifteenth century. The portion of the stone which has been cut off from the east end can be seen in the rough stone filling in between the outside jambs of the earlier and later doorways. The figures are arranged in pairs, in three divisions, under rudely-cut arches with pillars between each division; the figures are too mutilated to be identified, but as two of them hold something like an apple they have

¹ See *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xiv., pp. 5-13.

been mistaken for Adam and Eve. The figures are, however, draped, so Fosbroke's suggestion falls to the ground."

Many plain Norman fonts have been sent adrift out of our churches to make way for some more elaborate structure. These may, perchance, be seen in the vicar's garden doing duty for a flower vase, or in some cases they may be met with in the churchwardens' domains converted into still baser uses. Carter recorded in 1799 that at Westminster Abbey the font had been turned out and was lying upside-down in a side room. The ancient font of Upton St. Leonards was discovered at Barnwood in the early years of the nineteenth century doing duty in a farmyard, and now stands on a circular plinth in the churchyard near to the south door of the church. It is one of the earliest types of a Norman unmounted, tub-shaped font, like the one at Tangmere,¹ in Sussex, and represents in its form a "survival" of the baptismal piscina.

Of the early cylindrical bowls of Norman date some are barrel-shaped, and a good example may be found at Leckhampton. This bowl is adorned with the cable ornamentation at the top and bottom, and may have originally stood on a low, round pillar. Like some other early fonts, it has been raised at a later date, and in this case the desired height has been obtained by the addition of a circular base and a plinth 11 in. deep and possessing a circumference of nearly 7 ft.

Among the Romanesque schools of sculpture the Normans were not so advanced as those of Northern Spain, Burgundy, Poitou, Toulouse and Provence, and through their lack of skill they were obliged to confine themselves very largely to those geometrical patterns which were easy and simple in execution. When they came to England their stock-in-trade was chiefly composed of *torsades*, or cable; *palmettes*, honeysuckle, or anthemion; *chevron*, or zigzag; *rinceaux*, or scrolls of foliage; *billet*, round or square; *stars*; *damiers*, patterns like a chess-board; *imbrications*, or shingle; and

¹ Illustrated in Bond's *Fonts and Font Covers*, p. 30.

interlacings. These effective patterns are all found in the eleventh century in both Normandy and England, and in still greater profusion in the twelfth century. It is not often that we find the sculptor decorated the whole of his font with one of these patterns; occasionally, however, this is the case, and at Littleton-on-Severn may be seen a Norman font adorned with the *chevron* or zigzag carved in bands extending round the whole of the bowl. It is probable that the decoration of this font is unique; and although the *chevron* is used with excessive profusion by Norman masons on the orders of the arches of piers, doorways and windows, yet it is rarely found on fonts.¹

The font at Newnham once stood in the old church at Nab's End, now covered by the encroachments of the River Severn, and fortunately it escaped serious injury in the fire of February 28th, 1881, which destroyed the parish church of Newnham. Few Norman fonts possess a greater variety of geometrical patterns than the font at Newnham. The chief feature in the decoration is an arcade of round-headed arches, in which stand figures of the twelve apostles. These figures are somewhat rudely sculptured; the heads are uncovered, and they are depicted with beards and moustaches. They appear to be vested in copes, and in one case the under vestment is an alb with a girdle. The symbols held by the figures are difficult to make out—one has a crook, another is possibly a lance, which might indicate St. Matthias or St. Thaddeus, while St. Peter is represented with one key. One apostle holds an open book, and others are portrayed with closed books. The pillars show an interesting variety of Norman decoration. The *chevron*,²

¹ The *chevron* may be seen, among other ornamentation, on the fonts of St. Mary Steps (Exeter), Bessingby (Yorkshire), and at Rendcombe and Newnham in Gloucestershire.

² The *chevron* is an almost exact reproduction of a device found on ancient Roman stones; for example, on a fine altar discovered at Lancaster, in County Durham. See Bond's *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 40.

the sunk star, pellet and diamond are all clearly visible, while an elegant Romanesque pattern, which is a development of the well-known anthemion common in Greek, Roman and Byzantine work, adorns the lower portion of the bowl. A plain indented pattern is found on the circular base.

The same hand that sculptured the bowls at Rendcombe¹ and Newnham also carved the fragment of the Norman font at Mitcheldean. It is not known when the upper portion of the bowl was mutilated, but at the time Lysons saw it the lower portion had been inverted and a basin cut out of it. "This font," Samuel Lysons remarks in his *Gloucestershire Antiquities*, "seems to have been cut out of a circular-carved stone, evidently designed for some other purpose, probably the capital of a column. At the bottom appear halves of the figures of angels, which, as well as the pillars between which they stand, are reversed, clearly indicating that they were not intended to be placed in their present position. From the ornament on this font it seems as ancient as the twelfth century."² The conjecture that it belonged to the twelfth century is correct, but we know now that the figures were never intended for angels, but for the twelve apostles. No doubt Samuel Lysons imagined that a church dedicated to St. Michael and All Angels might possibly have had a capital sculptured with a number of the Heavenly Host, as he could only see their feet, while the lower portion of the copes would appear like the ends of their wings. The restoration of this font has been well carried out, and the one at Newnham was evidently most carefully studied by those who undertook it.³

The Norman font at Duntisbourne Abbot possesses special

¹ *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxxiii., p. 303.

² Lyson's *Glouc. Ant.*, plate cvii.

³ The depth of the ancient portion of the bowl is 1 ft. This includes the band of ornamentation, the lower portion of the figures of the apostles, and the pillars of the arcade.

interest for those who study decorative work. The ornamentation on this bowl gives us an early example of the trê-lobed foliage which was used profusely during the Early English period, when it was carved with so much precision and elegance. On the font at Duntisbourne Abbot it is sculptured in low relief, and the whole of the bowl is decorated with it in the form of six sprays of five branches, being 1 ft. in height and $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in width. The trê-lobed pattern is occasionally met with in Norman decorative work, and like the sculpture on this font, it is carved in low relief, while in the Early English period it is usually found deeply undercut. An excellent example of the earlier method may be seen on the lintel and jambs of the western processional doorway of the nave of Ely Cathedral,¹ which is a fine piece of Norman ornamentation.

¹ This doorway is illustrated in Bond's *Gothic Architecture in England*, p. 39.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE FONTS.¹

(b) NORMAN.

Rectangular Bowls.

C=Circumference. H=Height. D=Depth. R=Rim. Diameter=Diam. Exterior=Ext. Interior=Int.

	BOWL.	PEDESTAL.	REFERENCES.	REMARKS.
AVENING (Holy Cross).	Fragments built into north wall of the church and porch. The largest fragment (2 ft. 2½ in. by 1 ft. 1¾ in.) forms part of the internal jamb of the north door. The decoration consists of five figures (9 in. to 10½ in.) standing under round-headed arches placed in pairs. One circular pier shows well - formed capital and base.	<i>Bristol and Glouc. Trans.</i> , xiv. 6; xxii. 15.	The fragments of this rectangular font are sadly mutilated, and probably six figures stood on each side, representing the apostles. In that case the bowl would measure about 2 ft. 8 in. by 1 ft. 1¾ in. This would give us a bowl the same depth as the one in St. Philip's, Bristol, but about half a foot longer.

HANHAM ABBOTS
(St. George?).

Plain scalloped capital
(3 scallops each face),
2ft. 11¼ in. by 2ft. 11¼ in.
D. Ext.=1 ft. 2 in.,
Int.=10 in., Diam.=
1 ft. 6 in

Bowl rests on a roll
(C=4 ft. 9½ in.) and
circular mouldings
with four spurs (re-
stored) on plinth (1 ft.
6¾ in. by 1 ft. 6¾ in. by
6 in.) on rectangular
modern base.

....

The property was deeded
to the Abbot of Keyn-
sham in 1326, and the
church was built about
1450. The abbot
placed in his fifteenth-
century church a
Norman font and a
richly-carved Norman
piscina. It is not
known where the
abbot obtained them.

Cylindrical Bowls.

DUNTISBOURNE
ABBOT
(St. Peter).

Ornamented in low relief
with a trê-lobed foliage
design of six sprays (12½
in. by 12 in. to 18 in.),
with plain narrow bands
at top and bottom. D.
Ext.=1 ft. 4 in., Int.=
1 ft., Diam.=1 ft. 10 in.,
R=3½ in. to 4 in.

Cylinder with roll at
top: H=7 in., C=
4 ft. 3 in. Circular
base, H=7 in., C
(bottom)=6 ft. 7 in.,
standing on rectan-
gular plinth, 2 ft. 5½
in. by 2 ft. 5½ in. by
4 in.

....

A somewhat similar
design of trê-lobed
foliage may be seen
on the lintel of the
richly-carved western
processional doorway
of the nave of Ely
Cathedral.

Cylindrical Bowls (continued).

	BOWL.	PEDESTAL.	REFERENCES.	REMARKS.
LECKHAMPTON (St. Peter).	Cable ornament at top and bottom. D. Ext.=1 ft. 2 in., Int.=12 $\frac{3}{4}$ in., Diam.=1 ft. 7 in., R=2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., C=6 ft. 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.	Cylinder: H=5 in., C=4 ft. 4 in.; Upper base, H=6 in., C=5 ft. 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.; Lower base, H=11 in., C=6 ft. 10 in. Rectangular plinth: 2 ft. 9 in. by 2 ft. 9 in. by 5 in.	Cox and Harvey's <i>English Church Furniture</i> , p.200; <i>Memorials of Old Gloucestershire</i> , p. 117.	The damage done to the stone for removal of staples for the cover is carefully repaired, and font is in good state of preservation.
LITTLETON-ON-SEVERN (St. Mary de Malmesbury).	Ornamented with 13 large chevrons in rows. D. Ext.=1 ft. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., Int.=10 $\frac{1}{2}$ in., Diam.=2 ft., R=3 in., C (top)=8 ft. 3 in., (bottom) 6 ft. 2 in.	Octagonal pillar (H=10 in.) with spurs at corners.	The chevron ornamentation is very common in the Norman period, yet it is probable that no other bowl is decorated in a similar way.

MITCHELDEAN
(St. Michael and
All Angels).

Ornamented with a variant of the honeysuckle band at bottom and 12 arcades, having ornamented shafts, capitals and bases, containing 12 figures of the apostles. Lower portion (1 ft.) belonged to original bowl; upper portion is well-executed restoration. D. Ext.=1 ft. 8 in., Int.=10 in., C (top)=9 ft. 4 in., C (bottom)=7 ft. 4 in.

Modern base (D=4 in., C=8 ft. 4 in.) carved with an indented pattern like the base of the font at Newnham.

Lyson's *Glouc. Ant.*, Plate cvii.; Kerrick's Collection B.M.(illustrated): *Memorials of Old Gloucestershire*, p. 117; *Gentleman's Mag.*, 1822, Part I. 114; *Bristol and Glouc. Trans.*, vi. 271.

It is not known when the upper portion was destroyed, but the lower part was inverted and a basin hollowed out, and this was used as the font until it was restored.

Restored between 1879 and 1890. A stone of the same character, but rather different colour, was purposely chosen for the new work, so as to make the restoration a perfectly "honest" one. The work was done by a man at Ross. A font somewhat similar in character may be seen in Hereford Cathedral.

Cylindrical Bowls (continued).

	BOWL.	PEDESTAL.	REFERENCES.	REMARKS.
NEWNHAM-ON-SEVERN (St. Peter).	Ornamented with a development of the <i>anthe-mion</i> pattern at the bottom and adorned with 13 arcades, with richly-ornamented shafts, capitals and bases, containing figures of the twelve apostles. Plain band at top. C (top)=7 ft. 8½ in., D. Ext.=1 ft. 8½ in., Int.=1 ft. 3 in., R=3¼ in., Diam =1 ft. 11½ in.	Circular base carved with an indented pattern: H=1 ft. 4 in., C=7 ft. 9½ in.	Cox and Harvey's <i>English Church Furniture</i> , p.200; <i>Memorials of Old Gloucestershire</i> , p. 117.	This font was originally brought from the old church at Nab's End before the encroachment of the Severn covered the site with water.

ST. BRIAVELS
(St. Mary the
Virgin).

D. Ext.=10½ in., Int.=
9 in., Diam.=1 ft. 9 in.,
R=3 in. Chamfered
3 in. to shelf of sixteen
scallops, projecting 3½
in., with depth of 1¾ in.
and width of 4½ in.
Narrow band round top
of bowl.

Cylinder having roll
at top (1¾ in.): H=
5½ in., C=4 ft. 6 in.
Circular moulded
base, H=5 in., C=
6 ft. 1 in., on octagonal
plinth, H=1 ft. 4 in.

*Bristol and Glouc.
Trans.*, ix. 76.

The south arcade of the
nave is Norman, and
dates from about A.D.
1089 (see *Bristol and
Glouc. Trans.*, ix. 74),
and the font was
evidently made at the
same time, for the
stone and dressing of
the nave, arcade and
font are identical.

UPTON
ST. LEONARD.

Tub-shaped with plain
band (4 in.) round top.
D. Ext.=1 ft. 10½ in.,
Int.=1 ft., Diam.=
1 ft. 10½ in., R=2½ in.,
C=(top) 8 ft. 6 in.,
(bottom) 7 ft. 7 in.

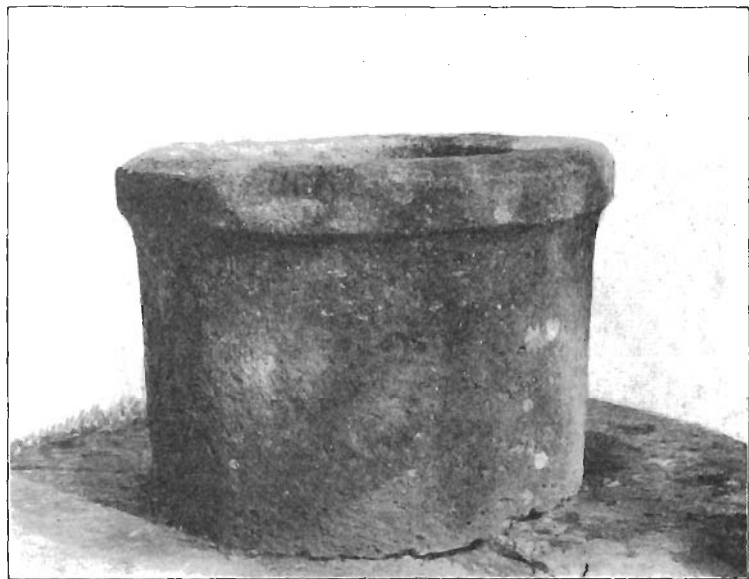
Stands on modern
circular plinth.

Bond's *Fonts*, p.
277 (illustrated
p. 276).

Found at Barnwood in
the early years of the
nineteenth century
doing duty in a farm-
yard. It is now placed
in the churchyard
near south door of
church.



AVENING.



UPTON ST. LEONARD.



ST. BRIAVELS.



HANHAM ABBOT'S.



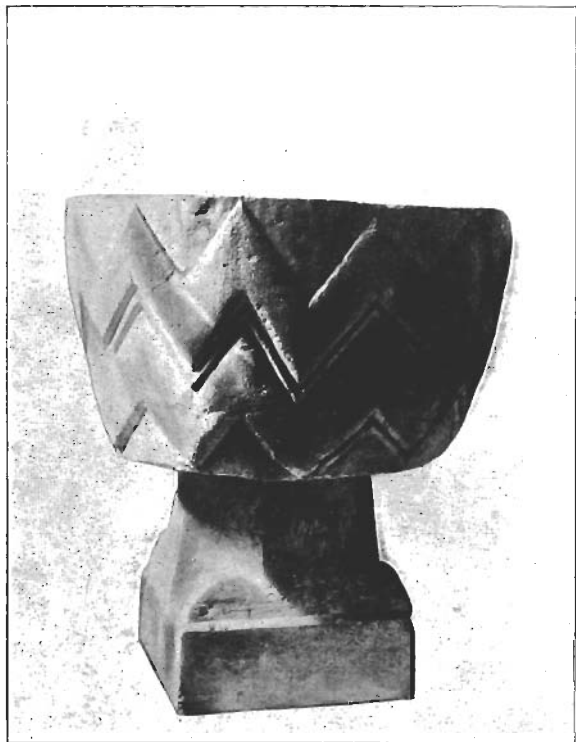
NEWNHAM.



DUNTISBOURNE ABBOT.



LECKHAMPTON.



LITTLETON-ON-SEVERN.