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Gloucestershire Fonts: (b) 15th Century

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GLOUCESTERSHIRE FONTS.

(b) FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

By ALFRED C. FRYER, Ph.D., F.S.A.

WHENEVER a good design was made for a font showing some degree of originality there was a tendency to copy it in the neighbouring parish churches. Even in the twelfth century this was noticeable;¹ but in the fourteenth and still more in the fifteenth century this craving to plagiarise a design was very pronounced, and as originality decreased there is less of interest to note. "For the most part," said the late Mr. Francis Bond, "experiment ceased; people preferred to accept convention; then as now it was easier to be like other people than to be oneself?"

The chief scope for the adornment of octagonal bowls lay in their rectangular panels. These are separated by either chamfered shafts, corner buttresses ending in pendants like those on the bowl at Ashton-under-Hill (Pl. I.), or the panel is surrounded by a moulded frame. In these Perpendicular fonts at present under consideration all the bowls are adorned with quatrefoils, and their centres are filled with roses, four-leaf flowers, etc., or feathered cusps of the quatrefoils, while at Charfield (Pl. II.), as well as roses we find uncharged heater-shaped shields. The upper part of the bowl at Yate (Pl. III.) is decorated with pateræ in a hollow moulding. The chamfer at St. Andrew's, Churchdown (Pl. II.) is adorned with Perpendicular ornaments, and the

¹ A series of Transitional Norman fonts possessing a strong family likeness may be seen at Altanon, Callington, Jacobstow, Landrake, Lanecast, Launceston (St. Thomas-the-Apostle), Lawhitten, and Warbstow. See *Jour. Brit. Arch. Ass.* (New Series), vol. vii. (1901), pp. 215-218.

² *Fountains and Font-covers*, p. 241.

one at Ashton-under-Hill (Pl. I.) with projecting foliage. The octagonal shafts have usually a niche on each face, but at Yate (Pl. III.) we find at the angles the common Perpendicular mullion moulding.

The wide chamfered base of the font at St. Andrew's, Churchdown (Pl. II.), is decorated with four-leaf flowers, etc. The beauty and freshness of the foliage of the Decorated style disappeared, and gave place to angular forms, not only to square panels but even to square foliage.¹

One of the most interesting features of the church at Aust is the beautiful font (Pl. I.), of a graceful and delicate design. It is, however, not unique, as a somewhat similar font of larger proportions may be seen in Chepstow Parish Church. Both these bowls are octagonal in shape, stand on circular shafts, and are supported by eight well-proportioned corner buttresses. It has been suggested² that these two fonts were executed from the same pattern and by the same craftsman. This is quite possible, and yet this may be another example of that tendency in the fifteenth century to copy and plagiarise, and a design of some freshness and originality may have been simply copied by a mason of another parish; for although Chepstow is in Monmouthshire and Aust is in Gloucestershire, yet the distance between them as the crow flies is little over three miles.

The Church of St. Andrew's, Churcham, was partially destroyed by fire in 1876, and the fragments of the fifteenth-century Perpendicular bowl and pedestal are now preserved in the churchyard. Sir Stephen R. Glynne visited this church on the 17th of May, 1850, and has left on record³ that "the font is Third Pointed, the bowl octagonal, panelled on each face with Tudor flowers, the stem foliated."

When the new Church of St. Andrew was being built at Churchdown, the Rector and Churchwardens of Witcombe

¹ Parker's *Introduction to Gothic Architecture*, p. 207.

² Robinson's *West Country Churches*, vol. i., p. 22.

³ *Glouc. Church Notes*, p. 86.

received a gift from the Rector of Lasborough of their old discarded Norman font, which had for many years been thrown out of Lasborough Church. Probably the people of Witcombe thought that a Norman font was more in keeping with the architecture of their church¹ than the interesting and beautiful fifteenth-century font they possessed. Whatever their reasons may have been, the fifteenth-century Witcombe font was given to St. Andrew's, Churchdown, and the Lasborough font installed in its place at Witcombe. However, some five years later the Patron of Lasborough (Colonel Holford) became acquainted with the transfer of the Lasborough font to Witcombe, and requested its return. After some correspondence this was agreed to, and Colonel Holford presented Witcombe Church with a replica of it.² Thus it came about that the fifteenth-century font of Witcombe is now in St. Andrew's Church at Churchdown, and Witcombe possesses only a replica of the Norman font of Lasborough.

In pre-Reformation days not only the woodwork in our parish churches, but also the stonework was made glorious and resplendent in gleaming gold-leaf and pure colours. Fonts were no exception to this scheme of colour-decoration, and fragments may here and there be seen on some of them. The mason who removed the Daglingworth font to its present position informed me that traces of red and green could be discerned.³ All this wealth of splendour and adornment was offensive to the Puritans, and they concealed it beneath coats of whitewash, or painted it over with imitation marble. The restorers of the nineteenth century were not content with the removal of the clouds of whitewash and imitation marble,

¹ The chancel and nave are Norman, but the fifteenth-century font was probably placed in the church when the north aisle and arcade were built.

² *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xxxvi., pp. 172, 178.

³ Vestiges of the original white and red may still be detected on the font at Saintbury. See *Trans. B. and G. Arch. Soc.*, vol. xl., p. 40.

but they actually destroyed all trace of the earlier colouring although they might have easily preserved it. The ancient rules of heraldry formed the basis to a large extent of the mediæval system of colour-decoration. Thus it came about that gilded patterns stand out against backgrounds of blue, fillets of gold separate mouldings of red and green, and coloured grounds would be powdered with golden flowers, emblems of saints or the sacred monogram. The general rule laid down in heraldry of not placing metal upon metal, or colour upon colour, was carefully observed, although examples exist where black devices are inserted on green or red grounds. Blue was usually made use of in the deep hollows and mouldings, black was often twisted with gold, green and red were employed freely, and a considerable amount of both white and gold was placed on surface decoration. The mediæval artist used clean bright colours, and he divided them in such a way that the result was harmonious and never presented a gaudy appearance. Gold was far more sparingly used in the West of England than in East Anglia ; yet it is probable that many of our ancient fonts presented interesting studies in colour-decoration of gold and red, soft green and vermilion, in carefully-arranged proportion, and other delightful schemes of colour adornment.

GLOUCESTERSHIRE FONTS.

(b) FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

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

	BOWL.	PEDESTAL.	REFERENCES.	REMARKS.
ASHTON-UNDER-HILL (St. Barbara).	Octagonal bowl. Each face adorned with quatrefoils, having centres composed of four-leaf flowers and other devices. Corner buttresses end in pendants, and each face of chamfer is adorned with a large leaf (7 in. by 6½ in.) projecting 6 in. Diam. Int. (top)=1 ft. 9 in., (bottom)=1 ft. 4 in., D. Int. = 11½ in., D. Ext.=1 ft. 10½ in. Each face=1 ft. 1 in. by 1 ft. 2½ in. R=5 in. to 7 in.	Octagonal pedestal. Each face adorned with a shallow niche (1 ft. 10 in. by 8½ in.). Chamfered plinth (3½ in. by 8½ in. at top and 9½ in. at bottom).

	BOWL.	PEDESTAL. ^a	REFERENCES.	REMARKS.
AUST.	Octagonal bowl with two small quatrefoils on each face ($4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $4\frac{1}{2}$ in.), having moulded chamfer and rim. Diam. Int. = 1 ft. $7\frac{1}{2}$ in., D. Int. = 9 in., D. Ext. = 1 ft. 1 in., R = 3 in. to 4 in.	Central circular shaft with moulded capital (H = 5 in.) and base (H = 11 in.), with a square buttress (2 ft. $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $1\frac{3}{4}$ in.) placed at each corner of the bowl.	Robinson's <i>West Country Churches</i> , i., p. 22; <i>Sketches</i> by Thomas Pope, i., p. 66 (Bristol Free Library).	Now painted white.
CHARFIELD.	Octagonal bowl. Each face ($10\frac{3}{4}$ in. by $10\frac{3}{4}$ in.) adorned on each face with a quatrefoil, having centres alternately roses and heater-shaped shields. The deep chamfer is decorated with shallow trefoil-headed niches on each face (1 ft. $0\frac{1}{2}$ in. by 1 ft. $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. at top and 6 in. at bottom).	Octagonal pillar (1 ft. $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.) with one trefoil-headed niche on each face. Chamfered plinth. Each face = $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $7\frac{3}{4}$ in. Modern octagonal step.	Robinson's <i>West Country Churches</i> , ii., p. 4.	Removed from old church of St. James when closed in 1882, and placed in the new church (St. John's).



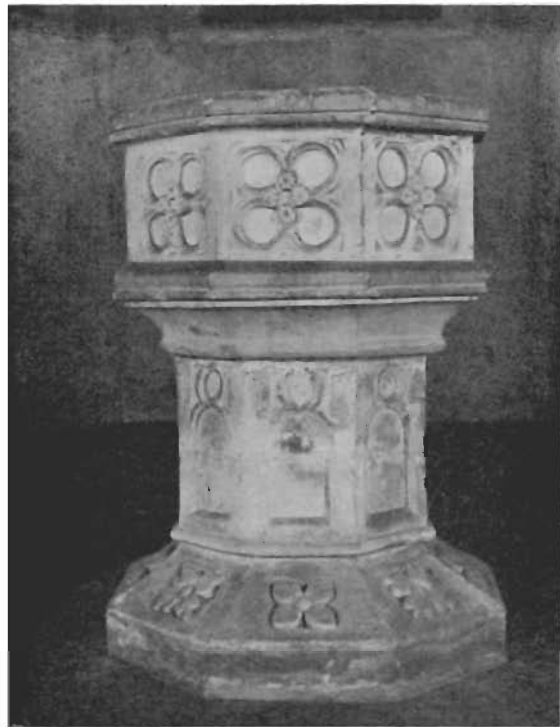
ASHTON-UNDER-HILL.



AUST.



CHARFIELD.



CHURCHDOWN.



ELMSTONE HARDWICK.



YATE.

CHURCHAM
(St. Andrew).

Octagonal bowl. Each panel adorned with Tudor flowers.

Foliated octagonal pedestal.

Glynne's
Church
p. 86.

Glouc.
Notes,

Fragments of the bowl and pedestal are in the churchyard.

CHURCHDOWN
(St. Andrew).

Octagonal bowl decorated with quatrefoils (8 in. by $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.) on each panel, with centre of four roses. Moulded chamfer. D. Ext.=1 ft. 6 in., D. Int.=1 ft., Diam.=1 ft. 7 in., R=4 in. to 5 in. Steps (modern).

Octagonal pedestal (1 ft. $0\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.) adorned with shallow niches. Chamfered plinth (8 in. by 1 ft. by 8 in.) decorated with four-leaf flowers (4 in. by $3\frac{1}{2}$ in.) in centre of each face.

Glynne's
Church
p. 9.

Glouc.
Notes,

This font formerly belonged to Witcombe Church.

DAGLINGWORTH
(Holy Cross).

Octagonal bowl. Each panel adorned with quatrefoils ($8\frac{1}{4}$ in. by $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.) having points ending in leaves. Each face of chamfer has a raised four-leaf flower ($4\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $4\frac{1}{2}$ in.). D. Ext.=1 ft. 4 in., D. Int.=11 in., Diam.=1 ft. 9 in. R.= $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. to $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. Plinth (modern).

Octagonal pedestal (1 ft. $3\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $8\frac{1}{4}$ in.) adorned with shallow ogee trefoil-headed niches in rectangular panels (1 ft. by 8 in.).

Glynne's
Church
p. 59.

Glouc.
Notes,

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	BOWL.	PEDESTAL.	REFERENCES.	REMARKS.
ELMSTONE HARDWICKE (St. Mary Magdalene).	Octagonal bowl adorned with panels (10½ in. by 10½ in.), containing quatrefoils (8¼ in. by 8¼ in.), with centres of four-leaf flowers and roses. In middle of each face of chamfer is a four-leaf flower, a piece of foliage or a rose. D. Ext.=1 ft. 5 in., D. Int.=11½ in., R=2 in. to 3 in., Diam.=1 ft. 10 in.	Octagonal shaft (1 ft. 3½ in. by 8 in.) adorned with rectangular panels containing trefoil-headed niches. Each panel is flanked by a corner buttress with a gable top. Moulded chamfer and base (7 in. by 8¾ in. by 9½ in.). Octagonal step (modern).	In the pavement beneath the south Norman arcade may be seen the original octagonal base.
GREAT WASHBOURNE (St. Mary).	Octagonal bowl adorned with panels containing quatrefoils. D. Ext.=1 ft. 6 in., D. Int.=9 in., Diam. (top)=1 ft. 8½ in., (bottom)=1 ft. 4½ in. Panels=11 in. by 10½ in.	Octagonal stem adorned with shallow niches. Each face=1 ft. 4 in. by 6 in. Moulded plinth=10 in. by 9½ in.	Glynne's <i>Glouc. Church Notes</i> , p. 161.	Font now painted white.

NORTH CERNEY
(All Saints).

Octagonal bowl. Each panel (1 ft. by 11½ in.) adorned with quatrefoils possessing centres of roses, four-leaf flowers, etc., and one large conventional leaf (6 in.) in middle of each face of chamfer. D. Ext.=1 ft. 8 in., D. Int.=1 ft. 1 in., R. 5¼ in. to 6¼ in., Diam.=1 ft. 8 in.

YATE
(St. Mary).

Octagonal bowl decorated with pateræ in hollow moulding. Each face is panelled with quatrefoils (10½ in. by 10½ in.), having centres of roses or feathered cusps of the quatrefoils. D. Ext.=1 ft. 6½ in., R=3¼ in. Octagonal basin.

Octagonal stem (1 ft. 3 in. by 5½ in.) containing plain rectangular panels. Chamfered plinth=6 in. by 6 in. at top and 7 in. at bottom.

Octagonal pedestal containing rectangular panels, having at angles the common Perpendicular mullion moulding. Each face =1 ft. 6½ in. by 11½ in. Octagonal base (4 in. by 8½ in.). Modern octagonal step.

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Illustrated in Paley's *Baptismal Fonts*; Cox and Harvey's *English Church Furniture*, p. 199.

The illustration in Paley's *Baptismal Fonts* shows the font to be then standing on a circular step (1844).