

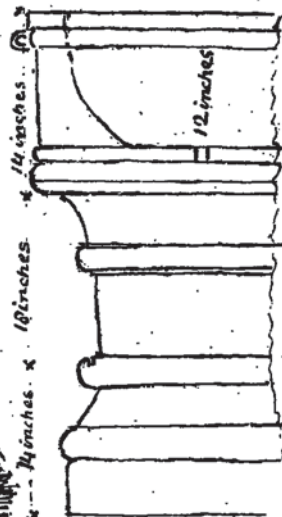
ON THE BAPTISMAL FONT AT ODIHAM.

BY REV. G. W. MINNS, LL.B.

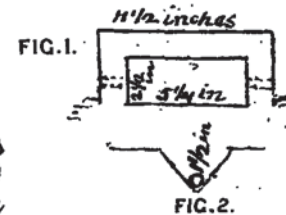
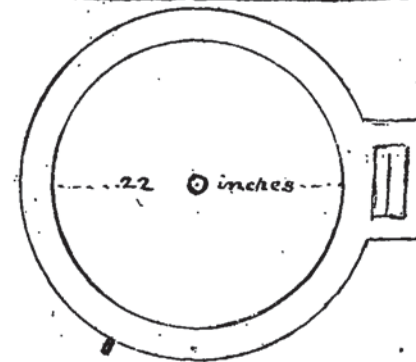
The font at Odiham Church presents some features of a character certainly unique in our county, and of rare occurrence elsewhere. On the occasion of a visit to the church by the Hants Field Club (Sept. 28th, 1889), much interest was excited as to the purpose of a singular projection, to be found on the upper surface of the circular basin. The Vicar, the Rev. T. G. Clarke, stated that some persons with authority for their opinion maintained that this singular feature was connected with ancient ritual observances in the administration of the sacrament of baptism; whilst others, amongst them some members there present, suggested that it was probably part of the arrangements for fastening the cover of the font. Since then a valuable paper has appeared in the *Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural Society*,¹ by Miss E. Swann, niece of Prof. Westwood, Professor of Zoology in that university, and whatever obscurity may have existed, it has been fairly removed by the light thrown on the subject, mainly owing to the researches of that lady. Miss Swann had her attention directed to the font at Odiham, where her family resides, and having access to authorities at the Bodleian Library, as well as possessing a large collection of illustrations and drawings of fonts made by herself, she has brought to bear on the subject a mass of information of very interesting character.

It is singular that no reference is made to the Odiham font in Mr. Paley's work on Fonts, nor is there any allusion to the

¹ *Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural Society*, No. xxxiii.



Inscribed Font with Piscina
at Oditham Hants



¶ A u d n m r u n a d n o q u a d e e t r e l a t t a

arrangement in Mr. W. Nelson Cole's *Archæology of Baptism*. Mons. de Caumont has noticed several examples in France, others have been found in Sweden, and a few exist in England and Wales and the Channel Islands.

The font at Odiham is situated at the west end of the Church, and, the stone of which it is composed being very soft, its architectural features are much mutilated. The mouldings and other details, which would guide us in affixing a date, have been tampered with, and much of their character is lost, but from what remains it is apparently a work of the 14th century. As will be seen from the accompanying illustration the font is of circular form, with moulded base, resting on the floor. Around the bowl runs a Latin inscription from the cxixth Psalm (Vulgate version), in raised characters, with the usual contractions, which extended reads thus :

Auxilium meum a domino qui fecit celum et terram.

A rude representation of a lily precedes the sentence. The characters and contractions are of the latter part of the 14th century. On the upper edge of the font the circle is broken by an oblong projection, having on its surface a V shaped hollow, about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length, $2\frac{1}{2}$ in width, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ in depth. At both ends is an outlet or hole pierced in the stone, adapted for the purpose of carrying off water, which would, as the font is at present arranged, fall on the floor.

That this sunk orifice was in any way connected with the font cover, and that the holes received the iron hasp connected with the hinge, as some have suggested, must certainly be abandoned, since on examination there is no sign of wear, and the holes are perfect, which would not be the case had iron been fixed in them and then forcibly removed. Moreover, traces of fixings connected with the font cover may still be seen on the upper surface, and the iron hasp remains in the side just above *qui* in the inscription, which at that point has suffered from the action of the lock or other fastening.

There can be no doubt that the orifice in question was connected with the administration of Baptism, and over it the infant was held by the officiating priest, so that any surplus water used in affusion would fall into the V shaped

recess back, and escape to the ground by the hole provided at each end. In support of this view it may be shown that various rituals of the Roman Church expressly ordain that the water used in baptism should not be allowed to return into the compartment containing that which had been consecrated, and this ordinance was the subject of a decree in the first Council of Milan.¹

The modern practice among Roman Catholics appears to be to divide the font into two parts, one containing the

¹ The following references have been made and the result kindly communicated by the Rev. F. E. Brightman, Librarian of Pusey House, Oxford:—"I have looked at several *ritualia* and some other things, and have found some rubrics, &c., which seem to throw light about the appendage to the font which you mentioned. The *ritualia* I have looked at are Continental diocesan adaptations of the Roman. There is generally a provision, such as I quote below, among the "preparanda ad baptismi administratum," but I have not found any such among the *ritualia* of Mainz and Antwerp. The general result is as follows:—

1. A vessel (*pelvis*) is to be provided to receive the water running off the head of the recipient. *Vide* Rituals of Paris, Meaux, Ratisbon, Vienna.
2. In some cases the water is to run off in *sacrarium*, or this is given as an alternative to a vessel. Fourth Council of Milan (ap. Martene, *de antiq. eccl. rit.* i. 1434 [t. i c 134]): "in baptismali fonte ubi per infusionem baptizatur, id plane caveatur ne aqua capiti infantis infusa in eundem fontem recidat sed in sacrarium profluat." *Rit. Roman* (ap. Maskell *H. Baptism*, p. 92, n. 6): "ubi vero baptismus fit per infusionem, cavendum est ne aqua ex infantis capite in fontem vel in sacrarium baptisterii prope ipsum fontem exstructum defluat, aut in aliquo vase ad hunc usum preparato recepta in ipsius baptisterii vel in ecclesiae sacrarium effundatur." The *sacrarium* I suppose is the sacristy, and a detached baptistery with a sacristy of its own is what is contemplated; and in the sacristies a piscina is implied. Maskell (op. cit., p. 8 and 21) quotes a statute of the diocese of Cambrai about a baptistery-piscina for a different purpose: "juxta fontem instituatür piscina aperta, ubi laventur manus eorum qui tenuerunt puerum, et vas lavetur quo infusus fuit puer, super piscinam autem illam ponatur cooperculum (ap. Martene, *Vet Script* t. iii, p. 450), cf *id de antiq. eccl. rit.* t. i, c. 215^A."
3. In some cases provision is made in the structure of the font. *Rouen Ritual* (1739, p. 17) "pelvis ad excipiendam aquam e capite baptizati defluentem nisi statim in piscinam descendat, quod commodius est. Sic ergo quantum fieri potest fons baptismalis disponatur ut lapis marmoreus vel communis in duas partes dividatur, in quarum una aqua servetur subter alteram autem sat profunda cavatam sit piscina ad aquam recipiendam." So *Contances Ritual* (1846, p. 18. 4^o).

consecrated water, and the other to receive the superfluous water used in administration. Mons. de Caumont¹ notes the existence of such an arrangement, but says he has never seen fonts divided into two compartments until the 15th century, and in ancient fonts presenting this characteristic the division had been made afterwards, but at the end of the 15th and the 16th centuries the partition is found part of the original structure. The same distinguished archæologist observes that in Maine and Brittany, and some parts of Normandy, fonts are to be found having near the bowl (*réservoir*) a vessel of smaller size,² to receive the water which had been poured on the neophytes. At Villers Cauvet (Calvados), he describes a font, "*à double piscine*," with two basins and drains, one to contain the water, the other to receive the water after affusion; this second basin being smaller and lower than the other, and pierced with a vertical hole, by which the water runs away to the earth. An arrangement of this kind is also found at Quimper and St. Pol de Leon (Finisterre) at Guingamp³ (Cotes du Nord) and at Clisson³ (Seine Inférieure) at St. Chirens³ and Cossene (Isère), and also St. Nicholas de Macherin.³ Two others are noted by

¹ Abécédaire d'Architecture (Architecture Religieuse, p. 692) aux Fonts Baptismaux.

² Vicomte de St. Andéol, in a paper on the subject in the *Revue de l'Art Chrétien*, calls the reservoir basin *cuvé* and the smaller réceptacle *cuvette*. He assigns the 15th century as the date of the origin of this arrangement, about which time the practice of affusion was generally adopted, and immersion fell into disuse. To the latter we must attribute the large basins, a marked characteristic of ancient fonts, of which several fine examples are found in Hants, at Winchester Cathedral, St. Michael's, Southampton, and Porchester. The mediæval manner of baptizing, according to the Sarum Manual, was as follows:—*Deinde accipiat Sacerdos infantem per latera in manibus suis, et interrogato nomine ejus baptizetur eum sub trina immersione*. The form of immersion here enjoined was retained in the First English Prayer Book, 1549, with the permission that, *if the child be weak, it shall suffice to pour water upon it*. Immersion is still recognised in the Book of Common Prayer in deference to antiquity, and those persons who attach importance to that mode, but in such a climate as ours "weakness" is generally assured, and affusion is adopted. There can be no doubt that affusion was practised instead of immersion (at the discretion of the priest) in ancient as well as modern times. See Lyndewood, Mon. Rit. i. CCIX. Rituale Rom. *De formâ Baptismi*, and the Catechism of the Council of Trent (II-7) speaks of affusion as the "general practice at that time," the middle of the 16th Century.

³ Figured in Proceedings of the Oxford Architectural Society, No. xxxiii.

Mr. James Parker at Roche-Mabille and Bléves. In all these cases the baptismal piscina is a smaller font, forming part of or connected with the larger basin, but in some instances as at Björland¹ and Säfve¹ in Sweden, also at Nun Monkton,¹ Yorkshire, the subsidiary vessel is in the step at the base of the font.

The only English example resembling the Odiham font is to be found at Youlgrave, Derbyshire, where a smaller receptacle is attached to the side of the font, ornamented with a dragon at the base, but having no outlet. There is to be found at the side of fonts as at Pitsford in Northamptonshire¹ a projection which probably served as a bracket for a book or other objects. In other cases a projection has evidently been chipped or sawn off, and it is impossible to determine what its purpose has been. The font at Shipton-on-Cherwell appears to have been thus mutilated. A small receptacle not furnished with a pipe or outlet is also found sometimes hollowed in the side of the font as at Faxton, Northamptonshire; or in the interior of the basin, as at Princes Tower, Jersey; or sometimes a hollow in the wall near the font, and may then have served the purpose of a chrismatory for oil, salt, or other accessories used in connection with the ceremony.² At St. Martin's, Exeter, a pocket-like receptacle is attached to the font just below the

¹ Illustrations of Baptismal Fonts, by T. C. (Thomas Cole), Van Voorst, 1844.

² The Service of Baptism in the Sarum Manual consists of three offices:—*Ordo ad faciendum Catechumenum*, *Benedictio Fontis*, and *Ritus baptizandi*. The first of these contained many ceremonies at the church door, such as the placing salt in the mouth, exorcism, and signings of the cross. The Baptismal Service then proceeded at the font with the questions, addresses to the sponsors, the anointing with sacred oil (Chrism) baptism, the putting on originally a white vesture, but afterwards simply a cloth, as described by Leland, *Christening of Prince Arthur*, vol. iv, p. 205, "After them the basons, &c., then a rich *chrisome*, which was pinnyde on the right brest of my Lady Anna, sister of the Quene, hanging on her left arme." The chrisom cloth was used to shroud the child if it died within a month. *Chrisoms* in old bills of mortality are such children as die within the month. The water in the font was changed on the Saturdays before Easter and Whit-Sunday, and at other times as often as might be required, but not while it continued fresh and clean. A constitution of Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1236, required that the font should be kept covered and locked. In most cases the old covers has disappeared, but either the staples, or the places where they have been, can be seen.

moulding where the hexagonal basin joins the pillar which supports it.

With the evidence which has been produced there can be no doubt as to the purpose of the appendage to the font at Odiham. Since the appearance of Miss Swann's paper the members of the British Archæological Society have expressed their thorough concurrence in the theory propounded, and it only remains for the writer to acknowledge his obligations to that lady for much valuable information and generous kindness in placing her drawings at his disposal for the purpose of this notice of the only example existing in our county.

