



✚
 HIC CORPVS FRIGBVRGEXEREQVI
 ESCIT IN PACEM SEPVLTVM



Ellen Stevens

BACK OF STONE.

MEMORIAL STONE, WHITCHURCH CHURCH, HANTS.

J. TOWNSEND & SON PHOTO LITH. ENGRAVERS & LONDON.

ON A SAXON SEPULCHRAL MONUMENT AT WHITCHURCH.

BY REV. G. W. MINNS, LL.B., F.S.A.

Whitchurch was visited by the Hampshire Field Club and Archæological Society in July, 1897, on which occasion Mr. T. W. Shore, F.G.S. our Organising Secretary read an interesting paper on its parochial history which dates back to very early times.

Reference is made to Whitchurch in several ancient charters from which we learn that about the year A.D. 790, Beorhtric, king of the west Saxons, gave extensive settlements (*cassatos*)¹ farms and manors at the neighbouring parish of Hurstbourne and elsewhere, in exchange for like lands and properties along the Meon river (*flumen quod appellatur Meoned*), belonging to a certain thane or noble named Hemele.

Later on we find that the thane Hemele transferred Whitchurch to the cathedral body of Winchester. The gift was confirmed by a charter of Edward the Elder, A.D. 909, and the Dean and Chapter of Winchester are to this day Lords of the Manor, and the patronage of the church is vested in the Bishop.

Whitchurch in early times was the scene of a battle between the Saxons and the Danes, and other incidents of early history are connected with the parish. On the occasion of the visit of the Field Club, the ancient seals of the town were exhibited, also a map dated 1730, which shewed that the acre strips of our Saxon forefathers were in

¹ *Cassatos* those who held a *cassatum*, by the Saxons called *Hide*, by Bede *Familia*, i.e. a house with land sufficient to maintain one family.—Cowell's *Interpreter*.

existence so recently as that year. "Lynch Hill" still marks the site of this early arrangement for the division of land by grassy boundaries known as *linches* or *linchets*.

To the Saxon period the sepulchral fragment of which we give an illustration undoubtedly belongs. The monument received notice, and an incorrect engraving appeared in "The Builder," of Nov. 11, 1871. A rude copy of the inscription is also given by Mr. J. Romilly Allen, in his "Early Christian Symbolism,"¹ but no representation of the original has been produced equal to that here presented from the accurate pencil of Miss E. Stevens, whose drawing these brief notes are intended to elucidate.

This remarkable stone was found imbedded in the wall of the north aisle at the renovation of the church in 1868, and owes its preservation to the good taste of the then vicar the Rev. W. M. Dudley, by whom it was placed in its present position near the north pier of the chancel, where it stands on a plain block of stone and is thus raised about 30 inches from the ground.

The memorial itself with its circular head and carved *tympanum* is evidently an imitation of the Roman form. The top measures 7 inches in thickness; the fragment is 10½ inches thick at the base; its height 22 inches; and width at base 20 inches. On the front is carved in high relief the bust of our Lord, with a cruciferous nimbus. He holds a book, the Word, in the left hand, the right hand is raised, the fingers arranged in the act of benediction. On the back of the stone is incised a scroll ornament of elegant interlaced design, and carried over the circular top, preceded by a cross, is the inscription incised in early characters which reads,

+ HIC CORPVS FRITHBVRGAE REQUIESCIT
IN PACE SEPVLTVM.

Here lies the body of Frithburga, buried in peace.

Of the person here commemorated no particulars are known. The few simple words of the inscription remind one

¹The Rhind Lecture in Archæology, 1885.

of the Christian assurance commonly found inscribed on graves in the catacombs at Rome. There is a total absence of the titles of rank and dignity with which monuments were subsequently overloaded, but that Frithburga was a lady of rank we may perhaps be permitted to assume; that she was of remarkable piety, possibly a person eminent in some religious order,¹ or even a royal personage we would fain imagine, since the Anglo-Sax. prefix *Frith* (*peace*) is commonly associated with the names of religious persons of importance, e.g. *Frithbert*, Bishop of Hexham, A.D. 735; *Frithwald*, Bishop of Witherne, 735; *Frithstan*, Bishop of Winchester, 910. The suffix *burga* is a termination, common to the names of religious and royal women, e.g. *Eadburga*, abbess of Minster, in Thanet, 740; *Colburga*, abbess of Berkely, 800; *Sexburga*, daughter of King Anna, 640; *Ethelburga*, Ina's Queen, 676.²

Mr. Thomas Wright in a letter to Mr. Roach Smith, remarks, "*Frid* in A.S. means *peace*; *borh* genitive *borges* a pledge. Thus the name latinized in form, *Frithburgæ*, may mean the pledge of peace. It is one of the common and very poetical names given by the Anglo Saxons to females; so that this inscription sounds as if it were that the body of the pledge of peace reposes in peace buried."³ Whether the inscription will bear this interpretation is doubtful, as there is considerable obscurity about some of the letters. In the name, the fourth letter is uncertain, and some read *Frioburga*, but Searle (*Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum*) and Hubner (*Inscriptiones Britannicæ Christianæ*) give the form we have adopted. Also the letter A appears to have been substituted for V, and in the word *pacem* the final *m* has apparently been obliterated. These errors, if such they be, may be attributed to the ignorance of the sculptor.

Mr. Shore, in his interesting paper above referred to, suggested that this memorial formerly recorded the site of a burial in the very earliest church here—the "White Church,"

¹ Some have supposed that the stone commemorates a nun of the neighbouring Abbey of Wherwell, which was founded by Elfrida, in expiation of her murders, about the year 986, but we are inclined to assign an earlier date to the stone.

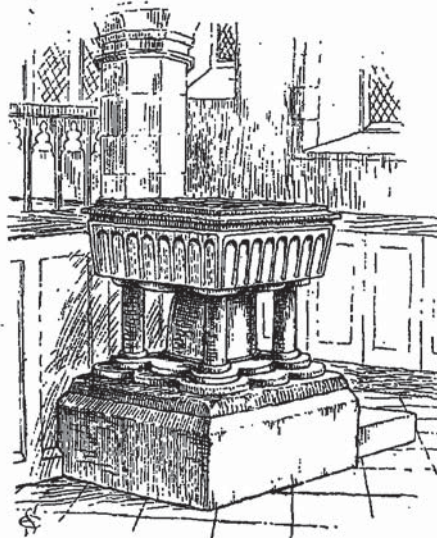
² *Vide* Anglo Saxon Chronicle.

³ "Builder," Nov. 11, 1871.

built of hard chalk found in the neighbourhood, from which the name of the place is derived. The name was in use at the time of the thane Hemele's gift to the see of Winchester, we may therefore conclude that there was a church at Whitchurch as early as the year A.D., 800, and if so we know of no other place in Hampshire where the existence of a parish church of so early a date can be traced.

The monument may with reason be assigned to the ninth century, or earlier part of the tenth century, and may possibly be much older. When the old Saxon church was replaced by the present early English structure, the stone was probably built into the north wall and to this circumstance we owe the preservation of this interesting relic of antiquity.

THE FONT AT BARTON STACEY.



Hampshire is remarkable for possessing examples of Fonts of unusual interest, notably those of black marble at Winchester Cathedral, St. Michael's, Southampton, and else-

where, to which we may add the curious, and in England, the almost unique arrangement to be found at Odiham.¹ The Font at Barton Stacey as given above is of a type somewhat common in the county. Its present position on the south side of the nave, at the back of the seats, between the two westernmost columns, is comparatively modern, and it has doubtless undergone more than one removal from its original position near the entrance door where the Font was always placed in ancient times as a symbol of entrance into the Church. About fifty years ago it occupied a place under a gallery which existed at the west end and was pulled down when the church was repewed. A minute of a resolution at the vestry meeting, Nov. 3rd, 1848, records "it was agreed that the Font should be removed to the line of seats." The following item occurs in a mason's bill, in 1849. "To mason, three days taking down and repairing Font, 8ft. 6in. cube, to base of Font." These entries doubtless refer to the removal of the Font to where it is now, and among the papers relating to the work are some letters which show that it was proposed to place it at the entrance of the chancel, but this was happily averted.

The form and arrangement of the Font are of a kind very general in the Early English period—a massive square bowl of Purbeck Marble, with panelled sides, resting on a central pillar with shafts at the angles. The new base on which it was placed in 1849, is 11 inches high, the other dimensions are:—

Height exclusive of step	...	...	30 in.
Depth of bowl outside	...	...	10 in.
Diameter across top	...	...	28½ in.
Diameter of interior	...	...	22½ in.
Depth of interior	...	...	10½ in.

The bowl has eight panels on each side and the arrangement is similar to the Fonts at Shirborne St. John, and Littleton. The latter church and Barton Stacey both

¹ Described Hants Field Club Papers, Vol. I., Part IV., 84. Fonts à double piscine, with two basins and drains, one to contain the water and the other to receive the water after affusion are common in parts of Brittany, but of the arrangement at Odiham we believe only one other example is found in England, at Youlgrave in Derbyshire.

belonged to St. Swithun's, the cathedral church of Winchester, which would possibly account for their similar fonts.

The Font is lined with lead with a drain hole. In the S.E. and opposite corner of the upper face, as the Font now stands, are holes¹—one still contains the iron staple embedded in lead, belonging to the fastenings of the cover which in the earlier Fonts consisted of a flat board, fastened down by an iron bar passing through staples projecting above the upper margin. The covers were kept locked by these in order to preserve the water pure in the Font which was always kept full. Lyndwoode also assigns another reason—to avoid profane uses.

At the Council of Durham, under Richard, Bishop of Durham, A.D. 1220, it was ordained "Let Fonts, the chrism, and the holy oils, be kept under lock and key on account of enchantments." The Constitutions of Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury also enjoin, that a Font of stone be provided in every *baptismal* church—collegiate and conventual churches had no fonts and some chapels or lesser dependent churches had not the right of baptism. The Font was to be provided with a proper cover with a lock (*cum sera*), and large enough (*competens*) says Lyndwood to have the child dipped in it, though he does not make this particular essential to the sacrament. Lyndwood's *Provinciale*, Lib. III., Tit. 24.

The extracts from the parish accounts and some particulars have been kindly furnished by the vicar, the Rev. U. Z. Rule. The illustration is from a sketch by Miss E. Stevens.

¹ The Font at Aldenham Herts is much like that at Barton Stacey and as here the staples are inserted in opposite angles of the upper surface.

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