

ST PETER, TITCHFIELD – AN EARLY GRANITE FONT

By J F POTTER

Whilst examining the geological building fabric of Titchfield (Potter 2003) and other Hampshire churches (Potter 2006) this unusual small font (Figs. 1 and 2) was observed resting on the floor of the south chapel of St Peter, Titchfield (SU

541 048). The font although relatively crude in structure, in size and shape resembles that described and figured from St Michael, Inkpen, in Berkshire (Potter 2004). Comparative measurements are given (in metres) below.

	<i>Maximum block size</i>		<i>Bowl dimensions</i>	
	<i>Laterally</i>	<i>Height</i>	<i>Diameter</i>	<i>Depth</i>
Titchfield	0.39 × 0.36	0.16	0.19	0.06
Inkpen	0.30 × 0.29	0.19	0.14	0.12



Fig. 1 Side view of small granite font, from St Peter, Titchfield, to show the two carrying handles (lens cap, 50mm).



Fig. 2 Oblique view of the Titchfield small granite font, to show the flat base to the interior of the bowl (upon which the lens cap rests).

The Titchfield bowl, like that at Inkpen, is not symmetrical, for it possesses two obvious carrying handles on the opposite corners of the longest lateral dimension. More noticeably than in the example from Inkpen, this bowl, despite its weight, was intended to be portable. While the external 'ornamentation' is only roughly carved, the interior of the bowl has apparently been ground on a 'lathe'. A sharp, clear contact exists, however, between the internal flat bottom of the bowl and its sides (Fig. 2). This is unlike the majority of font bowls which tend to be curved at this contact. The absence of a curved bottom to the inside of the bowl makes it unlikely that it was ever used as either a rotary quern or a mortar.

The Inkpen font was constructed from a block of travertine, the Titchfield example has, most unusually, been hewn out of granite. Granite is a much harder material, and this probably accounts for the lack of the bowl depth. The

off-white granite is certainly not from southern Britain (as Cornwall or Devon). Strictly it is a microgranite; the rock contains both muscovite and biotite micas as well as the customary quartz and feldspars. All the crystals tend to be of similar size and fairly equidimensional. The rock resembles certain Swedish and French (Brittany) microgranites but without petrological microscopic analysis such an origin cannot be confirmed and might be considered unlikely.

Titchfield church has long been recognised as including Anglo-Saxon features and Hare (1975; 1992) has proposed that these may date from the late 7th or early 8th century. Green and Green (1951, 22) argued a case that the church, which is in the Meon Valley, might have been built originally as the result of the evangelisation of a local settled Jutish tribe (the Meonwara) between the years 681 and 686. The Titchfield font bowl, in being portable, might possibly date back, or nearly so, to such early Anglo-Saxon times.

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