

REVIEW.

FONTS AND FONT COVERS. By Francis Bond.

Oxford University Press. 1908.

Our annual volumes of Proceedings have not hitherto admitted Reviews of Books; but the Literary Committee has decided that the rule may be relaxed in the case of books bearing wholly or partly on the county of Suffolk, which may be sent to the Editor of the Proceedings for review; books of a general archæological, ecclesiological, or natural history character, being still excluded from our purview.

Under this rule the book named at the head of this article may well claim notice at our hands; for it contains descriptions of or reference to fonts or font covers in no less than 38 places in Suffolk, and 42 separate parish churches, viz.: Ashby, Badingham, Barsham, Blythburgh, Bramford, Corton, Cratfield, Darsham, Denston, Elmswell, Fritton, Frostenden, Gorleston, Great Glemham, Hadleigh, Hepworth, Hoxne, Ipswich (5 churches), Melton, Orford, Oulton, Pakefield, Palgrave, Preston, Rattlesden, Saxmundham, Somerleyton, Southwold, Stoke-by-Nayland, Sudbury (St. Gregory), Thorington, Ufford, Westhall, Weston, Wiston, Woodbridge, Wortham.

The subject of church fonts in England is a large one, and it has never been treated exhaustively before. Earlier volumes on the subject have been fragmentary in their character, both as to letter-press and illustrations; and as to font covers they have escaped treatment almost entirely until now. The present volume contains 426 excellent illustrations, for the most part arranged chronologically under the centuries, or under the architectural periods to which they are assigned.

It is the largeness of the subject, within its proper limits, that makes us almost regret the addition of three introductory chapters and part of chapter four on, (1) the original import of the rite of baptism, (2) methods of administration of the rite of baptism, (3) the baptistery. Chapter iii. is unnecessary, because baptisteries neither are nor were found in the Church of England at any time. Mr. Bond mentions the fact of Archbishop Cuthbert building a baptistery at Canterbury in 750, but gives no reference; and was it a baptistery? The baptistery built at Cranbrook, Kent, in 1725, is too late to be taken into consideration (pp. 20-21). Two quotations are made from the works of Origen on the subject of infant baptism, one in English the other in Latin (p. 29). We do not dispute their correctness, but readers ought certainly to have been given an opportunity of verifying them. Discussing the proper season for baptism (p. 24), Mr. Bond ought to have included the Epiphany, for which there is evidence in Eastern Christendom and Ireland. It is not quite fair to say (p. 31) that in the Anglican Church the practice of immersion is a legal alternative for affusion. The rubrics there quoted prove that the correct statement is that affusion is a legal alternative for immersion. The two propositions do not mean quite the same thing. All these points occur in the opening chapters of the book, which try to cover too much ground, and which might well have been omitted by an author who probably would not claim to be a liturgical specialist.

But for the bulk of the book we have nothing but praise. The book will be simply indispensable for all persons interested in fonts, and for any person wishing to assign a date to an undated font. Although post-Reformation, and still more post-Restoration fonts, are occasionally dated, it is very rare to be able to fix a precise date for a pre-Reformation font. It can only be done in the cases of a very few fonts, such as those at Acle in Norfolk, Darsham in Suffolk, and Bradwell (county not mentioned, and not indexed), where armorial bearings or

the name of a donor, who is otherwise known, enable a nearly exact date to be assigned (p. 257).

The few cases where Roman pagan altars have been utilized for Christian fonts are of great interest (p. 99). The great antiquity of certain other fonts though widely affirmed can be sometimes disproved by the character of the ornamentation upon them as in the case of the font at St. Martin's, Canterbury (p. 91). Only a few fonts remain, the century or period of which is at present disputed, and about these the author does not dogmatize. We refer especially to the Dolton and Rowberrow fonts variously ascribed to the eighth and early eleventh centuries (pp. 103, 106), where we certainly incline to the earlier date; and the Bridekirk font, which has been ascribed to dates so varying as the eighth and the thirteenth centuries (pp. 107, 109). We can boast no pre-Conquest fonts in East Anglia, but of fonts of later, especially of fifteenth century date, the most beautiful and elaborate specimens are to be found in the Eastern Counties. For example, of fonts on which there are sculptured representations of the seven sacraments, out of a total of thirty, sixteen are in the County of Norfolk and twelve are in Suffolk (p. 259).

We must not now be led into the interesting department of font-covers, except to express a hope that the reader will not be led by the note on p. 299 to suppose that the magnificent font-cover at Hepworth, figured on p. 290 was originally the work of a local carver. That person is only responsible for renewals and repairs. When that church was burnt down a few years ago, the font-cover was fortunately among the few things saved. All lovers of ecclesiastical art will thank Mr. Bond for his valuable and beautiful volume.

F. E. W.

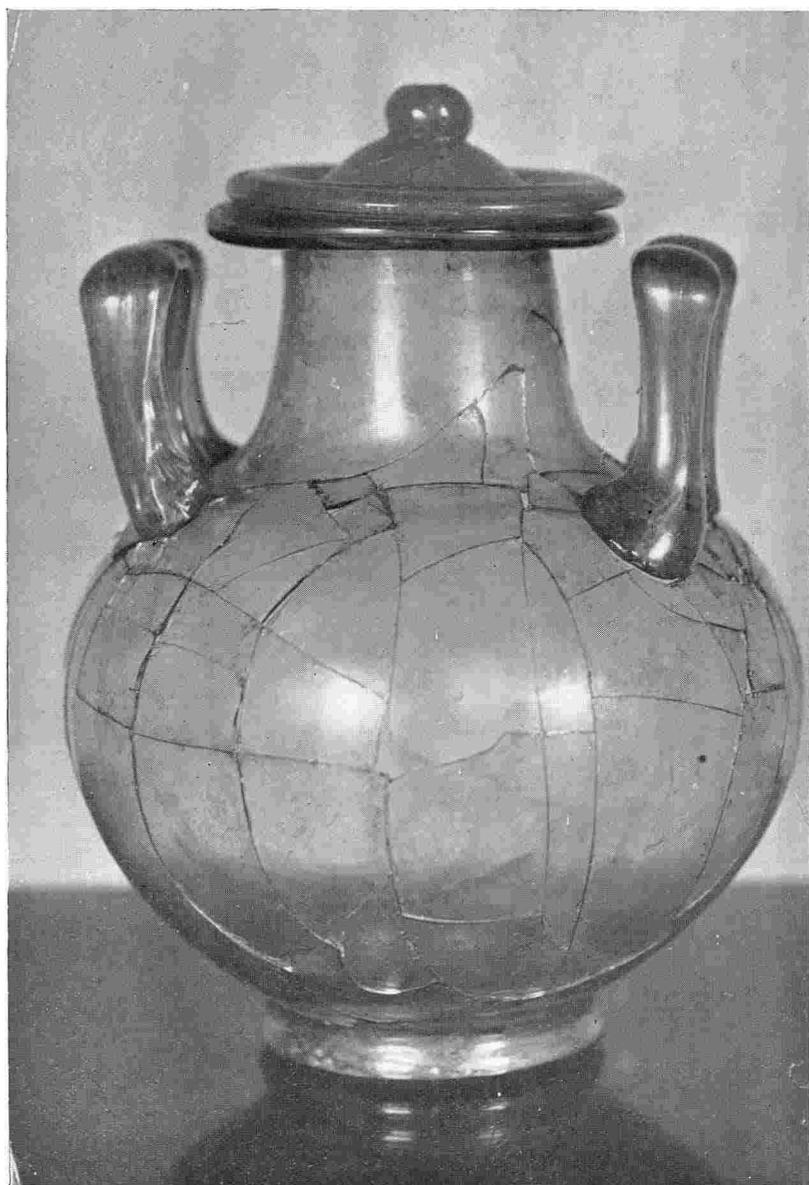


PLATE A: Roman Glass Cinerary Urn.