

# Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and Natural History.

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## CRATFIELD CHURCH.

### THE FONT.

The number of Fonts with representations of the Seven Sacraments is not nearly as large as is popularly supposed. There are only thirty-one of this type of Font at present existing in England; seventeen in Norfolk, twelve in Suffolk, one in Kent, and one in Somersetshire.

The Suffolk fonts of this class are found at Badingham, Blythburgh, Cratfield, Denston, Gorleston, Great Glemham, Laxfield, Melton, Southwold, Westhall, Weston, and Woodbridge.

Of these Cratfield and Laxfield are, I believe, the only two standing on a double stepped octagonal platform. In the upper step the Laxfield platform is divided by four triangular spaces—the apex of which is nearest the base of the font. These seem to have been intended to facilitate the kneeling of the sponsors, who would, of course, be three in number with the mother of the infant.

In the Cratfield Font, there are no spaces as at Laxfield, but the eight faces of the upper step are decorated with a circle, in which is a well-cut quatrefoil, three in each face, somewhat similar to the step in Earsham Church, Norfolk, just over the border; and also of Binham Priory, in the same county.

The lower step has been similarly enriched by quatrefoils, but these have been destroyed, and only traces are now left of a series of five in each face. This step is 9 inches in height ; the upper,  $10\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The height of the pedestal to the top of the bowl is 4 ft. 6 ins., and the entire height of the font is about 6 feet 2 inches from the floor.

Around the base of the pedestal are figures of the 4 Evangelists, with the four emblematic figures of their respective Gospels. Between these, under crocketed and ogee headed canopies, there are eight figures on pedestals, all of which are very much mutilated ; so much so, indeed, that in most instances only a conjecture can be offered by way of identification. I have examined each figure very carefully, and I think the series will be as follows : proceeding from due west by south to east, and by north round the west, S.W., S., S.E., E., N.E., N., N.W., (W.).

No. 1 is a figure vested in Cope, with what appears to be a Church in his left hand, to which he points with the right hand. May this indicate the Prior of St. Neots, as the original builder of the present Church ?

No. 2. A figure with a club, the head of which rests on the ground. Probably St. James.

No. 3. The figure is too much mutilated for denomination ; possibly the B.V. Mary, as the patron Saint to whom the Church was dedicated.

No. 4. The figure wears a robe which seems to have been richly decorated ; there are faint traces of colour.

No. 5. Appears to be the figure of St. Peter, with a key.

No. 6. With Crozier in right hand. The robe bears traces of colour (green).

No. 7. St. Paul, with a sword.

No. 8. St. John, with Chalice.

The Bowl is supported by eight half Angels with alternate shields and scrolls, and at the angles on the pilasters are eight mutilated figures. The pilasters which separate the panels on the 8 faces of the bowl terminate at their lower ends in pendants which have been knocked off. Carved in the face of the pilasters are eight niches with ogee heads; filling the niches are eight small full length figures. Proceeding as before from the West:

The first figure bears what looks like a tablet, but as all these figures are headless, the person represented can only be guessed at. Possibly, therefore, No. 1 may be that of Moses, bearing the tables of the Law.

No. 2 carries an unmistakeable Book under his left arm.

No. 3. A Bishop or Abbot with a Crozier in his right hand, and a Church in his left.

No. 4. A Bishop with some unknown object in his right hand, and a bag or purse in his left.

No. 5. A Monk with an image (?), or possibly a Tabernacle, of which only the steps or base is left, in his right hand, and a purse or bag in his left.

No. 6. A figure with a large arrow or javelin in his right hand, and a bag or purse in his left.

This is probably intended for King Edmund, whose Chapel is now the Vestry of the Church, but which still retains the original pace with the yellow and green pavement or tiles, and marks of the Altar slab on the east wall.

No. 7. A figure with a charter and seal in the right hand, and a wallet or purse in the left. This appears to be the figure of a female, and may represent the lady St. Liz, to whom the manor and advowson originally belonged, with the neighbouring Churches of Ubbeston and Heveningham, and who presented all three to the St. Neot's Priory.

No. 8 is the figure of a woman bearing a wheel, probably St. Catherine.

The Bowl of the font is on the exterior about 3 feet in diameter, the inside basin is two feet.

The panels on the eight faces of the bowl were, no doubt, intended to represent the Seven Sacraments of the Church, with an eighth face, which is usually the Crucifixion. This is generally found on the West, while the East panel, as nearest to the Altar, shews the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper: This is not the case in the Cratfield Font, and, indeed, the sequence of the panels is very singular, no regular order being maintained. The proper arrangement would, of course, be: Baptism; Confirmation, Holy Eucharist; Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony last. Here the West panel is vacant; only a step or pedestal, which is found in six of the other panels, remains; the seventh also is vacant, and is referred to in its proper place. It is a question whether the West panel has ever been filled.

No. 1. The S.E. panel has (apparently) four

figures, of which one is a mitred bishop with outstretched hand resting on a shapeless figure in the arms of what appears to be a woman. This is probably the Sacrament of Confirmation. The shapeless burden looks to be that of a child or infant; the figure of an acolyte is in the background, and on the left of the Bishop, in the foreground, is a woman with a butterfly head-dress, who seems to be placing her right hand on the left arm of the Bishop.

No. 2. The Eastern panel presents the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. The font, for the size of the panel, is very large and clear, the faces of it being cut in pointed arches, two to each panel, and the stem is treated in the same way but with smaller arches. It stands on a base of three steps. Here the officiating priest has the infant in his hands, face downwards, and is just on the point of immersion. Three sponsors are in attendance.

No. 3. The N.E. panel is the Crucifixion. The Cross remains in outline, but the figure of the Saviour has been demolished, excepting the Feet, through both of which a single nail has been driven.

Two figures on the right hand of the Crucifix are supporting and removing the B. Virgin Mother, and on the left are two other figures, one of which seems to be touching the Side of the Saviour, possibly receiving the Sacred Blood into the Holy Grail or Cup.

No. 4. The panel facing due East presents the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. This is one of the least injured of the series.

The arm of the priest is extended to the person in bed, conveying the Holy Chrism, but of both priest and man the head and shoulders have been mutilated.

Behind the head of the bed is a cleric in an alb appavelled, holding in his hand a Church, as a memorial. A third figure behind the officiating priest is holding a towel or cloth, on which is a small box for holding the anointing oil. A female figure stands weeping at the foot of the bed.

No. 5. The N.E. panel represents the Sacrament of Matrimony, in which there are six figures.

No. 6. N. gives us the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The figure of the Bishop is seated, the Archdeacon in an embroidered robe or Cope, stands to the left of the Bishop. The Bishop's chaplain to his right holding the Crozier, but of this only the lower part of the staff remains, with the hand grasping it. The Bishop's right hand only seems to be placed on the head of the kneeling Ordinand, while his left hand rests on his knee.

No. 7. The panel, as already noted, is without any sculpture, but marks remain which suggest that a sculptured work has been taken away.

No. 8. The West panel is also vacant, except for the foot or base of the sculptured work as aforesaid.

These two vacant panels are a puzzle. Were they *ever* filled? If not, why not?

Then again, if filled, what did they represent, and why were these two selected for special effacement by Dowsing or some other person? This man Dowsing was born and lived in the adjoining parish of Laxfield, though at one time he resided at Stratford St. Andrew, hard by, and must have known Cratfield font well. Hence the severity of his treatment,

especially in knocking off the heads of all the graven images thereupon. One cannot feel surprised at the removal of two panels; the only wonder is that he did not obliterate them all.

It should be added that the upper edge, or chamfer, of the panels is decorated with a series of delicate quatrefoils forming a border, which is apparently almost unique.

The figure of St. Edmund on the Cratfield Font, together with the chapel dedicated to his memory, suggests a pleasant reflection on the intercourse and friendship maintained between the great Abbey of Bury and the Priory of St. Neots. As the figure of the King holds a bag or purse, it points to substantial assistance received from the rich Abbey by the smaller and poorer brotherhood. This interest may be accounted for, perhaps, if we remember the constant intercourse which must have been going on for centuries between the two fraternities. St. Neots lies about thirty-six miles from Bury, and Bury about thirty-four from Cratfield, in what was then the only direct road. St. Edmund's Abbey was therefore the half-way house, and we can well imagine how gladly the monks, coming from their distant Priory to their three Churches in this neighbourhood, and returning again at brief intervals, would avail themselves of the hospitable offices of Bury.

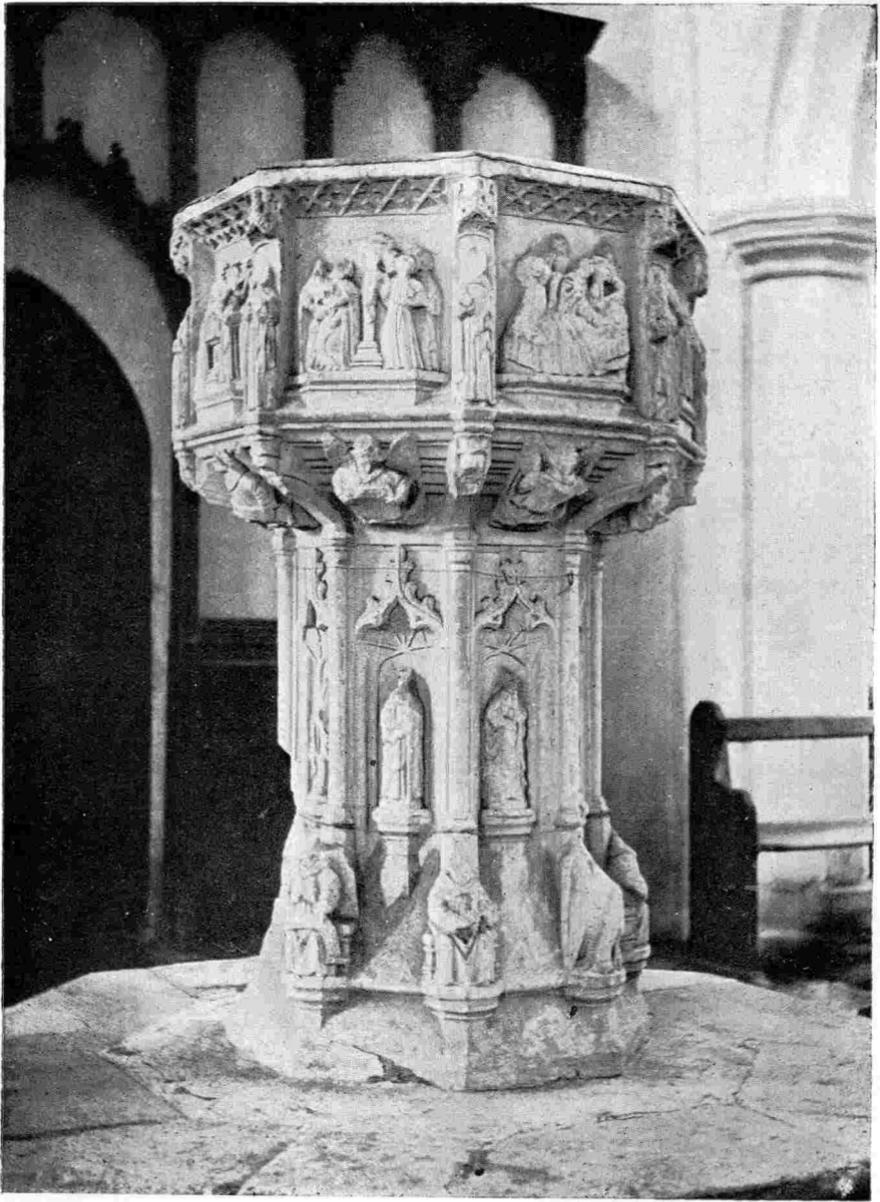
The road along which these ancient travellers passed is still in existence, in parts. It is no other than the ancient British way from Dunwich to Bury, and on through Newmarket, Cambridge, and St. Neots, to the heart of the country. The portion remaining in Cratfield is called "Tonk's Lane."

This, however, is not the only interesting link

between Cratfield and Bury Abbey. As a fruit of this friendly feeling, Cratfield gave to Bury its 23rd Abbot, William de Cratfield, who was elected to the abbacy, A.D. 1390, and who died in 1414. And again, the celebrated John Baret, the highly respected architect and Master of the Works under successive Abbots, was a native of Cratfield, being the son of Geoffrey Baret of that place. John Baret was one of the esquires or gentlemen deputed by the Abbot to wait on King Henry VI. when that monarch spent three months in the Abbey as the guest of Abbot William Curteys. The King bestowed upon Baret a collar of SS., which is mentioned in his Will. He died in 1416, after having greatly enriched and beautified the Lady Chapel of St. Mary's Church in Bury, the decorations of which still remain, together with his tomb. Baret died without issue, but left a large fortune to his great nephew, William Baret, the son of Geoffrey Baret, the younger, of Cratfield. This William, in his Will (dated August 1st, 1502) directed his executors to find a priest to go to Rome to pray for his soul, and on his return to do the same for a year in Cratfield Church.

I can find no sort of trace of the Baret family in the Registers of Cratfield, or in the Church itself, but the figures on the font have a strong likeness to the series of figures of the upright helms into which the hammer beams of the roof of St. Mary's Church in Bury are framed. These helms terminate with figures of the Twelve Apostles, Saints, Kings, and Queens, Bishops, Priests, etc., and are said by Mr. Tymms, in his history of that beautiful Church, to be "of such exquisite carving as to be scarcely inferior in finish and effect to marble statuary of a high order."

Nothing more remains to be said, except that



FONT IN CRATFIELD CHURCH.

Barett, the Cratfield-born artificer, must be regarded I think, as the designer, or perhaps the chief constructor of that glorious oaken roof with its "angels whose wings seem to quiver," since the principal at the end of the nave, which formerly shadowed the Rood, was painted and gilded by him, or at his direction, and his motto of "Grace me gouverne and God me gyde" is inscribed on the braces of the hammer beams.

A. J. BEDELL.