

A WOODEN FONT: AND SOME ALLEGORICAL GLASS ROUNDELS IN FULMER CHURCH

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WHAT was probably the seventeenth-century font of St. James's Church, Fulmer, as rebuilt by Sir Marmaduke Dayrell, and consecrated by Bishop Barlow, of Lincoln, on All Saints' Day, 1610 (see *Records of Bucks.*, vol. II, 28-32; 85-92), has come to light in the belfry. The present stone font dates from one of the restorations carried out between 1877 and 1884, and no mention is made in the Royal Commission's Inventory of any ancient fitting surviving.

There has been speculation for some time as to the precise nature and fate of the old font. In his description of Fulmer Church, Lipscomb (*History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham* (1847), IV, 499) says: 'A small square font, supported by a wooden pedestal, stands near the North door'. Another source, which at the moment cannot be traced, described the font as 'a poor (or mean) font of wood'. Since wooden fonts are sufficiently rare (Bond, *Fonts and Font Covers* (1908), 76, 77, mentions only half a dozen), this description of the old Fulmer font opened up interesting possibilities.

Lipscomb's description, if applied to the object under review, is substantially correct. The circular basin is of stone, or composition, 6 inches deep and $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It has the appearance of being later than the rest, and it has a small drain and brass plug. E. Tyrrell-Green (*Baptismal Fonts* (1928), 135) refers to fonts and bowls of Coad's artificial stone, one being of the date 1792. The bowl is set in a flat square of marble $20\frac{1}{2}$ inches square, and this, in turn, in a wooden, moulded framework 22 inches square at the top. This cornice, square on plan, tapers away by a series of square and curved mouldings (corona and sima recta) each from $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch deep, till the sides are each $19\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and the base of this upper part is 7 inches from its top.¹ The whole is supported on a wooden pedestal $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches square on plan, and at present 35 inches high, though the bottom is mutilated and it has clearly lost its base. One side is plain; the other three each have two oblong recessed panels, with a very prominent central angular lozenge projection or prism panel, surrounded by small modillions. Each panel is about 15 inches by $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Two of the lower projections are missing, and many of the modillions. The projecting underside of the top or cornice has been supported from the pedestal by four moulded console brackets or modillions on each face. Only one remains.

There is a flat cover with a moulded edge which has been 19 inches square, but one side is broken off, with moulded round knob in the centre.

The wood used is oak, with the usual round pegs. The whole is at present covered

A Wooden Font in Fulmer Church, Buckinghamshire

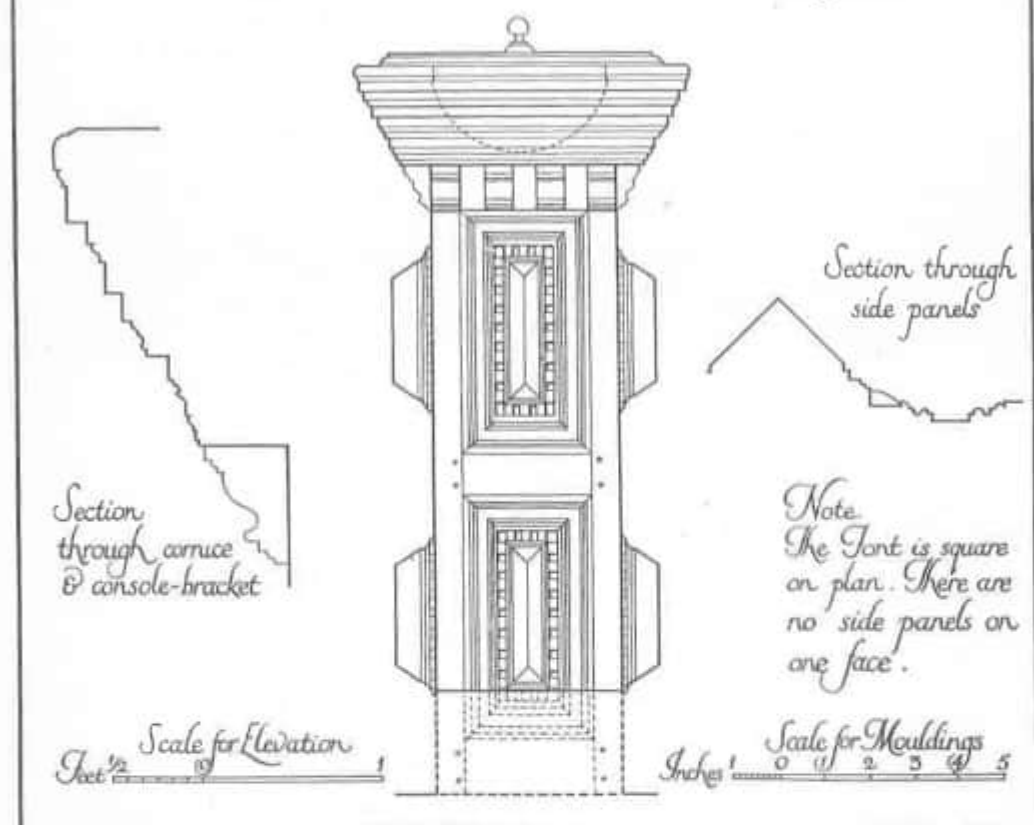


FIG. 1.

Drawing by D. Spittle.

with paint in imitation of dark oak graining; but there is evidence of a lighter coat beneath, which might have been marbling, in the manner of much of the woodwork of the Kederminster Pew at Langley (1625 or thereabouts). A careful comparison was made with the fairly closely dated work at Langley; and at the latter place the form of some console brackets on the overmantel was very similar to those on the font. The projecting lozenge or prism panel also occurred, though not in so flamboyant a form. The close correspondence of the shallow, almost scribed, mouldings may also be pointed out; and the fact that some of the panel corners were also mitred, in both instances, and not butted as was the more usual practice in the early seventeenth century. The whole style of the font is in fact early Jacobean in character, and there seems no reason to doubt that it is of early-seventeenth-century date. It is thus a rare and extremely interesting survival. A drawing of the font was submitted to Mr. Ralph Edwards, Keeper of the Department of Woodwork at the Victoria and Albert Museum, who said that from the sketch he would judge it to

be quite possible that the font dates about 1610, and that obviously it was a most exceptional example. The accompanying measured drawing (Fig. 1) of the font has very kindly been made by Mr. Denys Spittle of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments; and some of his observations on the font are incorporated in this description.²

Roundels of old glass in the South-East window of the nave. Four roundels of late-sixteenth- or early-seventeenth-century Flemish or German glass in this window have hitherto been, conveniently, vaguely described as 'probably depicting allegorical subjects'.

They have been identified with the help of the Warburg Institute as representing the Four Petrarch Triumphs.

1. Top left—cupid on winged horse trampling King and Queen; a statue of Venus in a niche or temple. Love.
2. Bottom left—winged figure in long robe and mural crown blowing a trumpet, mounted on an elephant, trampling on prostrate figure. A skull in the foreground, and figures rising from the earth. Fame.
3. Top right—elderly woman on goat, holding a skull, trampling on an elaborately dressed woman with broken pillar; landscape of dead trees. Death.
4. Bottom right—elaborately dressed young woman, holding complete pillar, riding on a unicorn, trampling on a woman and blindfold cupid, etc. Chastity.

Reference may be made to representations of the Triumphs in D'Essling and Muntz, *Pétrarque*, 1902; and to numerous photographs of other representations in the Warburg Institute's photographic collection. None is a very close parallel to the Fulmer roundels, but the main features are perfectly clear.

¹ The top element of the cornice moulding is slightly concave on plan.

² He also points out that many seventeenth-century wooden fonts are really casings for earlier stone fonts such as Stanford in the Vale (Berks.). There is a wooden post-Reformation font at Capel Cynon, Cardiganshire, which is described as 'a shallow square box of thin boards standing upon a rough pillar or shaft and placed in a pew . . . never intended to hold water, but simply (like the much more elaborate example at West Wycombe) to serve as a tray for the basin with which the Sacrament was so often administered. . . .' It is possible that the Fulmer example was originally something of this sort, later adapted with a stone basin.