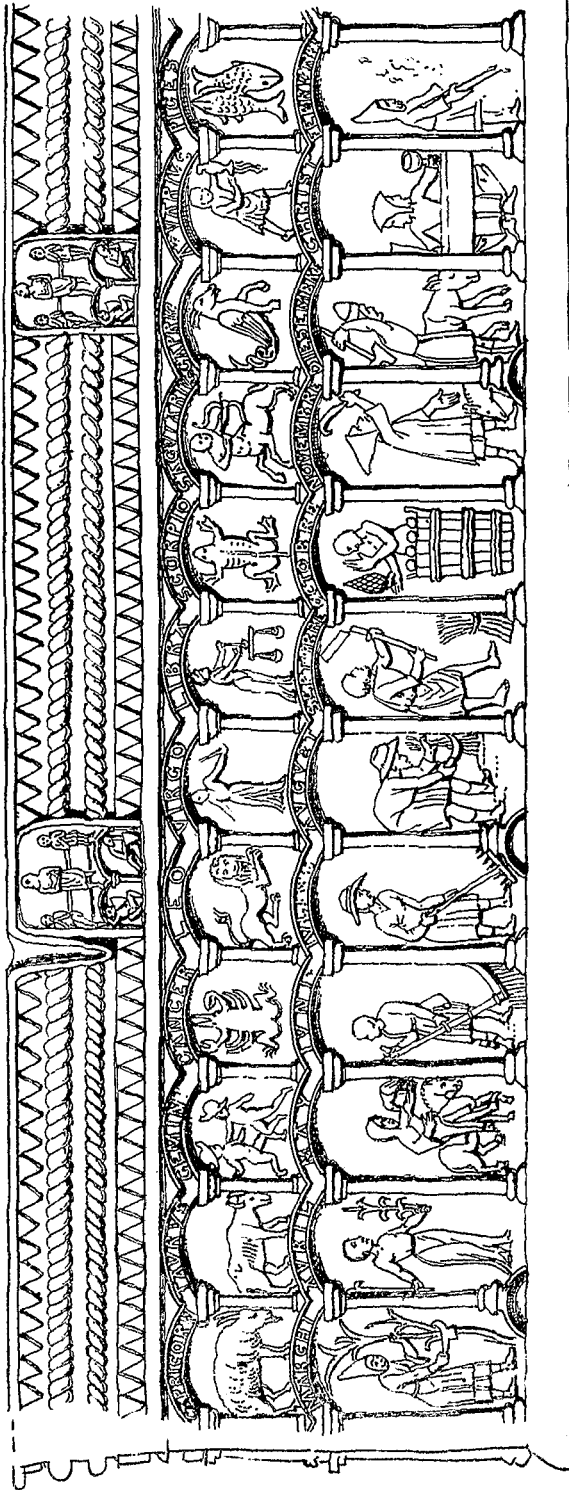


SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE LEADEN FONT OF  
BROOKLAND CHURCH, ROMNEY MARSH.

BY HERBERT L. SMITH, ESQ.

NEARLY a quarter of a century has glided away since the original drawing, from which the accompanying outline of the Brookland Font has been prepared, was made by the writer of this article for, and under the superintendence of, the late Rev. Thomas Streatfield. Since then, in the year 1849, plaster casts were made from twelve of the compartments, forming a complete series of the months and their corresponding Zodiacal signs. From these casts woodcuts were prepared, which, accompanied by a description from the pen of Mr. Nesbitt, were pre-



LEAD FONT AT BROOKLAND IN ROMNEY MARSH,

\* The Months from March to October inclusive are repeated.

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sented to the public in the pages of the 'Archæological Journal' for 1849.

But as some of the minuter and finer detail of the figures and costumes, etc., appear to have escaped observation, we hope that the interest attached to this font as a work of early mediæval art is not exhausted, and that we shall be justified in attempting a further elucidation of the subject from observations made during a careful investigation of the font itself, in the year 1837. The parish of Brookland lies in the centre of Romney Marsh. The church is dedicated to St. Augustine, to whose monastery it was attached until the Reformation, since which it has existed as an advowson of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury. Like many other churches in the Marsh, it appears to have been built to accommodate a larger population than at present exists in the parish. It has three aisles and three chancels. The belfry is rather a curiosity in its way: a tall spire of wood stands, like a huge extinguisher, upon the ground close to the church door: tradition reports that it was erected with timber—which is very ponderous—excavated from the diluvial bed of the Marsh; it is divided into five stories or floors, and at the present time contains five bells, although the remaining fittings for other bells show that it once contained a larger number.

On entering the church, we discover the Font upon a rude platform of stone raised three steps above the level of the pavement, beside one of the short Gothic columns of the nave, as represented in the woodcut placed at the head of this article.<sup>1</sup> The font is elevated upon a base, of stones roughly plastered, of the same shape and size as the font. An occasional coat of lead-coloured paint appears to be gradually choking up the lettering and other minutæ.

<sup>1</sup> For which I am indebted to the good offices of H. Mackeson, Esq., of Hythe, and the artistic skill of his friend, Captain Wray, R.E.

The dimensions of this font, external measurement, are 2 feet 1 inch in diameter, and 1 foot 4 inches in depth, affording ample capacity for infant immersion.

The circumference, of about 6 feet, is divided into twenty compartments, each  $3\frac{1}{2}$  by 6 inches; these spaces are occupied by figures symbolical of the months of the year and their occupations. Above the months are the signs of the Zodiac; eight of the twenty spaces are occupied by a repetition of the symbols from March to October inclusive. The spaces are divided by small Anglo-Norman columns and arches, upon which latter are inscribed, in Lombardic lettering, the titles of the subject beneath. Every fifth pillar rests upon a little arch, by which arrangement the year is divided into three equal parts, two of which agree pretty well with Easter and Advent, but that between July and August does not appear to conform to any known ecclesiastical or civil period. The ornamentation of the upper part of the font consists of two rows of sharks' teeth, and two of cable scroll,—familiar Anglo-Norman embellishments. Upon this bordering rests three or four little tablets of the Resurrection, and there is also a spout or lip for the overflow of the water.

Our outline commences with the month of March, inscribed *Marchi*, which is symbolized by a comfortably clad rustic, chopping or pruning a tree. Over the ordinary garment he wears his winter cloak, closely belted round his waist; the pointed capuchin is drawn over his head; on his feet are high, close-fitting boots, like those worn by the countrymen of the present day. The bill-hook with which he works, we recognize as that with which the farm labourer still prepares his hurdles or shapes his hedge.

Instead of Aries as the constellation of the month, we are presented with a creature which, by the straightness of its horns and bearded chin, indicates the goat, which is confirmed by the superscription of *Capricorn*.

April.—*Avril*.—Is a sort of Gothic Virtumus, clothed in a long Saxon robe and girdle, bearing in each hand a sprouting plant.

Above this figure is the resemblance of a very small, lean animal, which stands as the resemblance of Taurus.

May—so spelt.—A knight or gentleman, mounted on a palfrey, bears on his left hand a hawk; his head is covered by a round hood, and his body by a long cloak. The attitude seems to be that of a Norman rather than a Saxon horseman: this is the only figure not of the character of a rustic. The earlier Saxons associated the month with the abundance of milk yielded by the cattle, calling it *Tri-milki*, but Alcuin, in the middle of the eighth century, re-named it “Pleasure Month,” with which title the occupation of this figure very well accords.

The Twins, Gemini, are indicated by two naked children in violent action, wearing the *Roman* petasus or hat.

June.—*Juni*.—The inclement weather having passed, the rustic lays aside his cloak and hood, clad in a short tunic he appears as a mower with the long-bladed scythe; in a loop of leather at his side rests the whetstone, and on his right leg is a guard.

In the compartment above, we recognize the Crab, and the title of Cancer.

July.—The title appears to be “*Julius*.” A draped figure, wearing the broad-brimmed hat, or petasus, as a screen from the rays of the sun’s increased power; the usual high boots cover the feet: the instrument in the hands of the figure appears to be the ordinary hay-rake. The old Saxons called the month “*Heymonat*,” and Alcuin also calls it the Hay-month.

Above is the constellation Leo, a well-defined lion.

August. This, the *Barn-monat*, or *Harvest-month*, is well expressed by the stooping reaper, whose dress is precisely that of the previous month. With his left

hand he gathers up the ears, which he cuts down with the sickle in his right.

Virgo, the Virgin, is attired like the figure representing April, and has a similar action, holding in one hand the spike of corn, and in the other the vindematrix.

September.—*Septembre*.—From the Latin *Septem ab imbre*. With bare head and feet, and short tunic, the thrasher wields aloft his flail over a sheaf of barley or wheat.

Libra, in female attire and bandaged eyes, holds in her left hand the scales of justice, while with the right she points to the even beam, the emblem of equal night and day.

October.—*Octobre*.—Designated by the Saxons as Wyn or Wine-Monat. A figure, apparently standing in a hooped vat, or wine-press; in one hand is a conical object, probably intended for a bunch of grapes, while on the edge of the vat are certain round objects, possibly indicating apples, thus representing the double occupation of the season, cider-making and the vintage.

Scorpio.—The Zodiacal accompaniment, which should exhibit the form of a scorpion, only escapes association with a frog or toad by the addition of a diminutive tail; but as this creature has at all times been of somewhat apocryphal habits and nature, a little uncertainty of form must be forgiven.

November.—*Novembre*.—The inclement season having commenced, the rustic resumes his cloak and capuchin. Thus clad, the swineherd leads forth his drove into the brown woods; with a crooked staff he beats down the acorns and beech-mast for the feast of the hungry crowd, represented by one diligent hog at his feet.

Sagittarius,—“Sagutarius,”—is classically expressed, discharging his arrow behind him while in full speed.

December.—*Decembre*.—For this month's symbol we recognize the butcher fulfilling his important early winter

offices of killing the animals for salting down as winter stock. With upraised arms he sways the ponderous pole-axe that it may descend upon the head of the devoted steer. He wears a cap turned up at the edge, much like the orthodox attire of a slaughterman of the present day. The axe is so close to the pillar, that the point or tube with which the blow would be inflicted cannot be seen, but from the reversed position of the blade it is evident the blow would be given with the back of the instrument.

The title of Capricornus reappears in this its appropriate season. But what shall we say for the nondescript creature which does duty for a goat? Even the head scarce resembles the animal, and the two legs and feet are more like those of a horse; wings adorn the sides, and the body terminates in a long, convoluted tail. The artist or director of this work has manifestly fallen into some confusion of ideas respecting Aries and Capricornus, so much so that the former has slipped out of the Zodiac altogether; having appropriated the goat and his title for March, he evidently had nothing left but to repeat the name in its proper place, and vary the aspect of the animal to the best of his imagination.

January—*Christ*—meaning, probably, *Christ-monat*. The title of the month is superseded by the important festival which introduces it. In the two-faced figure seated at the table, with a Saxon horn in one hand and a goblet in the other, we recognize the hospitable Janus giving to the departing year its farewell, and to the coming one its welcome; two dogs, looking in opposite directions, are at his feet.

Aquarius, attired in a short tunic, is vigorously overturning the contents of his water-jar.

February—*Februari*—is, from injury, the least definite of the occupations; hence some persons have imagined that it presents the idea of a man warming himself be-

fore a fire, but the constrained manner in which the man grasps the object before him, together with the outdoor costume, well agrees with the occupation of ploughing, which could scarcely be omitted at this its proper season from such an agricultural series.

The title Pisces and a well-defined brace of fishes complete the Zodiac.

The tablets of the Resurrection are repetitions of a single design. Beneath two little arches lie the sleeping soldiers; the centre figure above represents the rising Saviour; behind is the sepulchre; on either side an angel.

In reviewing this casting, as a specimen of early mediæval art, we may remove it at once from comparison with fonts of stone, which would be the work of the mason. In this the metal-worker and founder would be the agents, and we think it highly probable that it emanated from the atelier of one of those ingenious, but, as individuals, little-known artists, of whom there must have been a constant succession engaged in the preparation of seals and coins. As an instance, the seal of the Priory of Cambwell, which is given in our second volume, suggests a strong resemblance to the Font in its treatment. The age of the Seal, 1130, is near to that of the font.

Not more than about twenty leaden fonts are known in this country, amongst which we believe this to be unique for design, which is that of a mixed Gothic and Classic character, and was probably made in a Norman or Flemish workshop. The attitudes, costume, and implements much resemble other works of art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, of which time some windows in the Cathedral of Mons present the exact type of the rustic representation of March. The design for the Resurrection is almost repeated upon an embossed silver book-cover of the thirteenth century. And



a psalter of the twelfth century is illustrated with designs resembling those of the font.<sup>1</sup>

As the titles of the months offer some peculiarities which indicate the age of this work, it may be interesting to quote some of the ancient calendars and place them side by side, from the heathen Saxons down to the engrafting of classic lore on that stem in the fourteenth century.

Heathen Saxon.	Christian Saxon.	8th Century. Alcuin.	Brookland Font.	14th Century. Norman Kalendar.			
Monat.	Monat.	Month.	Giuli	Wolf	Winter	Christ.	Jeniveer.
			Sol	Sprout-kele	Horning	Februari.	Februaire.
			Rehd	Lenet	Spring	Marchi.	March.
			Eostre	Oster	Easter	Avril.	Averil.
			Tri milchi	Iri milki	Pleasure	May	May.
			Lida	Weyd	Fallow	Juni.	Junii.
			Lida	Hey	Hay	Julius.	Julii.
			Weird	Barn	Harvest	August.	Augustus.
			Halig	Berst	Meadow	Septembre.	Septembre.
			Wyntyr *	Wyn	Wind	Octobre.	Octobre.
			Bloth	Wint	Autumn	Novembre.	Novembre.
			Geola	Winter	Holy	Diesembre.	Decembre.

We here perceive how the orthodox piety of the Anglo-Saxon school of theology gradually banished from the nomenclature of their almanac the purely idolatrous element, until, in the eighth century, Alcuin, the friend and instructor of Charlemagne, established his simple pastoral calendar, which in its turn was superseded by the classic heathenism of Papal Rome. Between these periods this font seems to form the link. The illustrations are those of Saxon agriculture, while the titles and Zodiac are the Romish or Byzantine graft.

There is another curious matter worthy of a passing remark, it is the title for the first month,—“*Christ*,” meaning Christ-monat, or month. We are all acquainted with the long and bitter contention in the Christian world with respect to the observance of Easter. A somewhat similar difference existed with regard to the time of the Nativity. Alcuin contended for the winter’s

<sup>1</sup> See SÈRE et LACROIX, ‘Art of the Middle Ages.’

solstice, which brought the birth of Christ within the month of December, and he named it "Holy Month," and January he called "Winter Month." But the Oriental Church had fixed the period for the 6th of January, now the Epiphany. Hence, in the Saxon Poetical Calendar (Fox's translation) we read:—

Christ, the glory of kings,  
 the illustrious Lord,  
 the eternal Almighty,  
 was born  
 at mid-winter;  
 and on the eighth day  
 was named Jesus,  
 Guardian of heaven's kingdom.  
 Then at the same time  
 numerous crowds,  
 many people,  
 have the first keeping of the year,  
 because the honoured  
 Calends came,  
 on that same day,  
 to us.  
 This is the first month  
 which the great people (*the Romans*)  
 in their calendar  
 call January.  
 And it is from thence after five nights  
 that the baptismal time (*the Epiphany*)  
 of the Eternal Lord  
 comes to us : etc. etc.

The subject is satisfactorily accounted for by this quotation, without further reference to the influence which Oriental opinion must have exercised under the tutelage of the Greek Archbishop of Canterbury, Theodore of Tarsus, and his friend Adrian, of Africa, who was the chief classical tutor of the Saxon students.

With respect to the style of execution displayed in this font, we may remark, that whilst there is much of the grotesque, there is also much that is appropriate, characteristic, and even graceful, both in attitude and

expression; each figure tells the story of its occupation without confusion of ideas.

The relation which these subjects bear to the baptismal office is most apparent in the little tablets of the Resurrection, which recalls the Apostolic declaration, that "If we are planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

Perhaps a further suggestion might have occurred to the mind of the arranger of the design, somewhat akin to the old Saxon feeling which dedicated the circle of the months to religious reminiscences, and thus through all the year called to mind the Giver of every good and perfect gift, so elegantly expressed by the poet Thomson, in his Hymn to the Seasons:—

"These as they change, Almighty Father, these  
Are but Thy varied works. The rolling year  
Is full of Thee. Forth in the pleasing spring  
Thy beauty walks, Thy tenderness and love.

Then comes Thy glory in the summer months  
With light and heat refulgent.

Thy beauty shines in autumn unconfined,  
And spreads a common feast for all that lives.  
In winter awful Thou!

Riding sublime, Thou bidd'st the world adore,  
And humblest nature with Thy northern blast."