

## THE LEADEN FONT AT BROOKLAND.

BY THE REV. G. M. LIVETT, F.S.A.

THE *Archæological Journal* for March, 1900, contains an exhaustive Paper on "Leaden Fonts," written by Alfred C. Fryer, Ph.D., M.A., and illustrated by a beautiful series of reproductions of the author's photographs. Dr. Fryer tells us there are twenty-seven leaden fonts in England, many of them of Norman date. Three of these are in Kent. The oldest of the three is "a very remarkable leaden font" at Brookland Church in Romney Marsh. The next in age is a leaden bowl "which was dug up a few years ago from out of a mass of brickwork," and is now in the Church at Wichling, near Sittingbourne. Dr. Fryer has little doubt it was constructed at the end of the Early English or the beginning of the Decorated period. It has a diameter of 20 inches and is  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches in depth. "Its ornamentation consists of a geometrical pattern (10 inches high by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide) which is repeated ten times." I have not seen this font.

The third of the Kentish trio is not now in use, but is preserved in the Church of Eythorne, near Dover. It is in a battered condition and measures 21 inches by 10 inches. It shews eleven rectangular panels, of which four contain the date, 1624, and the remaining seven have each "a naked figure of a man holding what appears to be a torch in his left hand"—"perhaps intended to represent Adam." The figures seem to have been all cast in the same mould.

The Brookland font alone of all the English leaden fonts shews a representation of the signs of the Zodiac and of the labours of the months of the year. It has a leaden, tub-shaped, flat-bottomed bowl, on a plain circular Caen-stone base, with square plinth, slightly chamfered. The tooling of the Caen-stone suggests a late twelfth-century or a thirteenth-century date; but the details of the ornamentation of the bowl point distinctly to a Norman date, before rather than after the middle of the twelfth century. It is not unlikely that the moulds, carved in wood, were kept for many years,



*G. M. Livett, Photo.*

**BROOKLAND FONT :**

A PORTION OF THE SHEET REPRESENTING SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER.

and that in course of time several fonts were made from them. If such was the case the execution and erection of the Brookland font may have been later in date than the design suggests.

The height of the bowl is 16 inches, and it measures about 72 inches in circumference. It was cast in ten sheets, soldered together, 14 inches in height, and varying in width, most of them being about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide. The diameter inside is about 21 inches, expanding just at the top to 22 inches. Round the bottom, outside, there is a plain chamfer, from the top of which the circular bowl rises. Round the top there is a flat projecting lip, about 1 inch wide, to which the sheets are soldered. Immediately under the projecting lip a row of shark's teeth runs round the bowl, points upwards;\* then come two rings of cable-moulding, turned in opposite directions; then another ring of shark's teeth, points downwards. Underneath these mouldings the bowl shews two tiers of arcading, with depressed circular arches: the upper tier contains the signs of the Zodiac, while the lower tier, of rather greater height, contains the labours of the months. The appropriate titles are impressed on the heads of the arches. Two months are represented on each of the ten sheets, making twenty months in all, the eight months from March to October being repeated from the same moulds.

Line-drawings of six sheets, shewing the twelve months, may be seen in the *Archæological Journal* of the year 1849, in illustration of an excellent description of the font from the pen of Mr. Alexander Nesbitt. Another description, illustrated by line-drawings, will be found in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. IV., written by Mr. H. L. Smith. Canon Scott-Robertson summarized these accounts in Vol. XIII. But line-drawings made before photography came to the assistance of illustrators are proverbially inaccurate, and the descriptions referred to seem to contain several mistakes of transcription in the titles of the signs and labours.

The best brief description is that of Dr. Fryer, who wisely gets out of the difficulty of deciphering the titles by calling the months by their English names instead of transcribing the original Norman-French titles. Dr. Fryer gives three photographic illustrations which, if necessarily small, are remarkably clear; and the present writer is content to ask the Editor to insert one on a rather larger scale: it represents the months of September and October.

\* This moulding seems to have escaped the notice of previous writers.

The bowl is doubtless of twelfth-century date, and I do not think the use of Norman-French titles necessarily indicates a continental origin as Mr. H. L. Smith has suggested. The treatment of the symbols of the months is said to be essentially Saxon or English in character, and the fact that a leaden font, very much like that of Brookland, exists at St. Evrouet de Montford, in the department of Orne, is by no means a proof that the Brookland font was designed out of England.

Representations of the month-labours must have been very common in our country in mediæval times. Examples, more or less perfect, exist in illuminated MSS. of pre-Conquest date, one of which is reproduced in Traill's *Social England*, vol. i. ;\* in the Runic Calendars and Staffordshire Clogg Almanacks; in a wooden frieze at St. Alban's Abbey; in *miserere* stalls at Worcester and Malvern; and on a Norman stone font at Burnham Deepdale, Norfolk.

Representations of the months by the signs of the Zodiac appear to have been equally common, and oftentimes the signs and the labours were associated. This appears to have been the case in the pavement of the Trinity Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, where some of the signs and labours, as well as representations of virtues and vices, may still be traced.†

The subject was fully discussed in a Paper by Mr. James Fowler, F.S.A., entitled "Mediæval Representations of the Months and Seasons," and published in vol. xlv. of *Archæologia* (1873).

With regard to the signs of the Zodiac on the Brookland font, the treatment calls for no remark, and it will be sufficient to give the titles in full, beginning with March: Capricornus (by error for Aries), Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagutarius (*sic*), Capricornus, Aquarius, Pices (*sic*).

The fact that March is the first of the eight months represented in duplicate would seem to imply that the artist commenced the series with that month. This is unusual, but Giotto's paintings of the months in the great hall at Padua afford a parallel instance, the series commencing with the month conventionally regarded as that of the vernal equinox.‡ The sculptured signs on a capital of the Ducal Palace at Venice seem to begin with the same month.§

\* From Cotton MSS., Julian, A., vi., tenth or eleventh century.

† See Shaw's *Specimens of Tile Pavements*, 1858; and Murray's *Cathedrals, Canterbury*, plate viii.

‡ See *Archæologia*, vol. xlv., pp. 172, 176.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Yet another instance occurs in the west porch of Cremona Cathedral.

While the signs of the Zodiac are sufficiently explained by their titles, which are easily read, the titles of the months, on the other hand, are in some cases difficult to decipher, and the representations of the labours are open to some difference of opinion with regard to their interpretation. I venture, therefore, to give a complete list, with a few preliminary remarks embodying the result of my own examination.

Previous writers have followed one another in reading the word *Christ* into the title of the month of January, as being the *Christ-month*. Mr. H. L. Smith remarks: "The title of the month (January) is superseded by the important festival which introduces it," and Mr. Fowler compares the Anglo-Saxon names of the month, *Yule-month* and *Holy-month*. The letters are difficult if not impossible to decipher; the distinctly French form of the remaining titles leads me to suggest JANVIER.

In the title of February the last two letters seem to me without doubt to be ER, so I read FEVRIER instead of *Februari*.

There are too many letters in Mr. Smith's *Marchi*, which I think should be read as MARS; and MAI and JVIN should certainly be so read instead of *May* and *Juni*. Of course the V in the titles of June, July, and August stands for U.

In the title of July there appear to be seven letters, and it seems to me to be much more like JVILLET than *Julius*.

The title of August has only five letters. I have little doubt that it ought to be read AVOVT. This spelling reveals an interesting stage in the history of the word as it contracted from the Latin *Augustus* to the modern French *Août*.

In the titles of September, November, and December N takes the place of *m* in the second syllable of each. In December, which Mr. Smith transcribes as *Decembre*, it is clear that S takes the place of *c*, and it may be further noted that the initial D is turned round, and appears as Q. The use of N instead of M has a parallel in the titles of the month-symbols in the Mosaic pavement of the choir of Aosta Cathedral, said to be a work of the latter half of the twelfth century. In the title of September the *p* is omitted.

The most interesting of all the titles is that of October, transcribed by previous writers without comment as *Octobre*. I prefer to transcribe it VITOVVRE, in which the first and fifth letters may be regarded as representing U, and the sixth as V. Of the first

three letters (VIT) I have no doubt, and they may, perhaps, with some likelihood be regarded as representing a form of the name of the month which the font alone has preserved to us. That the French *huit*, without its aspirate, may in some dialect or provincialism have replaced the first syllable of the word as used in polite speech is by no means impossible, as I imagine. In the second syllable (OVVRE) I am not quite certain about the double V. It is not very distinct, but it seems impossible to read B in the place of either one or both of these letters. The difficulty remains unsolved, unless we may imagine that the artist spelt the word as he was wont to pronounce it under the influence of a provincial dialect—*uitouvre*.

The list of names certainly seems to betray illiteracy, but as transcribed by Mr. Smith it is "neither chalk nor cheese," neither consistently Latin nor consistently Norman-French. It is hard to imagine even an illiterate Saxon of the twelfth century writing *Marchi* and *Avril* in close proximity, or putting *Juni* next to *Julius*, following these essays of Latinity with the modern *August* and French *Septembre*. The list which I have ventured to substitute below hangs well together, presenting names which, I am told, are all possible in twelfth-century Norman-French. The sculptured stone-font of Burnham Deepdale, of which the Rector has kindly sent me a photograph, presents some parallels sufficiently remarkable to be worth noting.

**JANVIER.** Two-faced Janus, seated at a table, with Saxon drinking-horn and goblet in either hand outstretched, drinking the old year out and the new year in. The table represents the Yuletide or Christmas feast. (Burnham Deepdale has this same subject treated more simply.)

**FÉVRIER.** A man seated and warming himself at a fire out of doors. (B. D. the same.)

**MARS.** A man pruning a vine. (B. D. has digging for March and pruning for April.)

**AVRIL.** A bareheaded figure in a long robe, holding in each hand a sprouting branch. The Rev. Henry Crowe, "the worthy and sagacious rector of Burnham" in 1799, describes the *May* labour of the Deepdale font in the following terms: "A female figure with long hair, having a banner in her hand. Before her a tree in full foliage, an emblem of the month." And he adds, "May it not allude to the perambulation?" Mr. Pegge quotes the description and approves the conjecture. Mr. Smith and Canon

Scott Robertson offer no explanation. Comparison with many examples in other series confirms the conjecture that the symbol of April at Brookland corresponds with that of May at Burnham Deepdale, and has reference to the Processions at Rogation-tide, the *Gang-days* falling occasionally in April, though more often in May.\*

MAI (called by Alcuin "the pleasure month"). A knight on a palfrey with a hawk on his left fist.

JVIN. A man mowing with a long-bladed scythe. (B. D. has weeding for June, the Saxon *weed-month*, and mowing for July.)

JVILLET. A man working with a rake, appropriate to the Saxon *hay-month*.

AVOVT. A man reaping with a sickle. (B. D. has a man binding up a sheaf of corn.)

SETENBRE. A man threshing corn with a flail. (B. D. the same.)

VITOVVRE. Wine-pressing. A man standing in a hooped vat and holding up a bunch of grapes. Appropriate to the Saxon *wine-month*. (B. D. has barrelling wine.)

NOVENBRE. A swineherd holding aloft a hooked stick (no doubt beating oaks) and a pig feeding (on the fallen acorns). Specially appropriate in the county of *dens* or hog-pastures. (B. D. has pig-sticking.)

GESENBRE. A man with uplifted axe killing a pig, no doubt for Christmas cheer. (B. D. has a table spread for the feast.)

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One additional feature of the bowl calls for brief notice. In three places the lines of moulding near the top of the bowl are rudely cut away to receive a small sheet separately cast and soldered on to the bowl. This was evidently an afterthought, and it may possibly indicate an addition of later date. These three small sheets all present the same design, now much defaced. Each one appears to be divided into two compartments by a horizontal line. Under the line there are two small triangular-headed (?) arches, and each of these contains a figure in a cramped attitude, similar in treatment to mediæval representations of the Resurrection.

\* See Rock's *Church of our Fathers* (1903 edition), vol. iii., p. 182.

Above the line there are three erect figures, the middle one larger than the others, and shewing its right foot in front of the horizontal dividing line. The dexter figure appears to have its hands folded in adoration. It has been suggested that the design is intended to represent the Resurrection, the central figure being the Christ. Such a representation, with evident reference to the Pauline doctrine, "buried with Him in baptism, whereby ye are risen with Him to newness of life," would certainly be appropriate to a font.