

ALDINGTON FONT.

BY V. J. TORR.

MR. F. C. ELLISTON ERWOOD, F.S.A., in his paper on Aldington church in *Arch. Cant.*, XLI., 149, states that "the font is poor," and although commenting on the woodwork fittings of the church in general, strangely makes no reference to the fine Jacobean font cover belonging to it. Conversely, the Rev. G. S. Long, rector of Aldington, in his pamphlet upon the building, obtainable in the church, notices the cover, but says nothing of the font.

Mr. Erwood's statement should not be allowed to pass unchallenged, and it has therefore seemed fitting to vindicate the Aldington font by the following short note.

This font belongs to a fairly numerous group scattered about the county, the general design of which is a square bowl (the sides either plain as in this case, or sculptured with shallow arcading) standing on a central shaft and four smaller ones at the angles, with a few minor varieties of construction. All of them are of twelfth or early thirteenth century date, though it is by no means easy to draw the line in some cases. Of Norman date, the fonts at Upper Hardres, Westwell, Tilmanstone and Fordwich (without angle shafts) may serve as examples of the arcaded bowl type, and Higham, West Peckham and Wouldham of the plain. Approximately of *circa* 1200, may be cited High Halstow, Cooling (unless the ornament was added later to a Norman bowl), and Aldington, which bears thirteenth century tooling. Snargate is probably of the early thirteenth century, and Adisham certainly so except the possibly older bowl, while such examples as Postling and Hinxhill have so little certain evidence upon them that it is difficult to be sure whether they are Norman or Early English, though the latter is in both cases, I think, more probable.



Photo. V. J. Torr.

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The Aldington bowl seems of limestone, square, chamfered off at the under edges, has an old lead lining with central drain, and is free from repair save at the S.W. top corner. The plain central cylinder seems of ragstone and is original, together with the S.E. and S.W. angle shafts, of Bethersden marble. The other two are modern restorations in Bathstone. None of these shafts have caps or bases, which may render an earlier date than 1200 possible, though unlikely in view of the E.E. tooling on the base; but the platform (of original Bethersden) on which the shafts rest has a simple base moulding all round. The sloping base, also original, is of Caën stone, and the step on which the font stands is of Bethersden, repaired only round the edges on the east, north and west. The marks of the mediæval staples for locking on a cover to the bowl are not easy to distinguish, but may have been on the east and west sides of the top of the bowl, and possibly also at the S.W. corner, where the repair has been made. The font step abuts at its S.W. angle on the S. respond of the fine tower arch.

So far from this font being a "poor" one, it is of simple but good design, and remarkably interesting on account of four different kinds of stone being employed in its construction, and a fifth in its repair.

The cover is also a valuable specimen of its early seventeenth century date, and is of the form of a square tabernacle with a trefoiled panel on each face, showing survival of Gothic influence, and having a detached Ionic shaft at each angle, surmounted by a ball finial, the whole crowned by four crocketed ogee Gothic-survival uprights like flying buttresses, bearing a finial, which was loose last year and should be properly secured. This cover is one of the best in Kent and is a good example of the beautiful post-Reformation church furniture so often recklessly and improperly ejected in the last century. I offer a photograph of the font and cover, taken by myself in September, 1929.