

A cluster of seventeenth century fonts

Way back in the 2017 *Project Gargoyle Newsletter* I drew attention to the unusual font at Muston which was photographed by Neil Fortey, one of the Project's volunteers.

When I got to the shots of the font I mentally stumbled. Here was a seemingly perfectly normal – though rather well-done – Perpendicular style font. So it should have been carved between the late fourteenth century and the middle sixteenth century.

But – and it's the sort of 'but' which made me stop in my tracks – there was a small army of faces and heads with arms. There were far too many for this to be a typical piece of 'Perp' masonry as, by this time, things were a little more restrained than in the previous century or so. And, they looked very little like medieval Gothic carvings. Instead they

reminded me of faces on seventeenth century wooden furniture.

Indeed, this font seems to have been carved in the later 1630s as John Nichols in his *History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* refers to it as being 'new in 1641'. This was during the time William Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury and there was a countrywide spree of church restoration.

Since 2017 I have come across a short list of 'Laudian' fonts (Bond 1908: 265) They are:

Byford, Herefordshire, 1638

East Ham, Essex [now London], 1639

Great Greenford, Middlesex [now London], 1638

Rackheath Magna, Norfolk, 1639

Byford's font is also octagonal but with almost no decoration except the date (though perhaps originally painted). None of the other three fonts are deemed significant enough for there to be photographs online.



Left: *Muston font*. Right: *Bottesford font*. Photographs by Neil Fortey.

Bottesford

Immediately to the north-west of Muston is the superb church at Bottesford. Neil Fortey and myself had a lengthy discussion while looking at the curious font in the church at Bottesford. Could it be contemporary with Muston?

The presence of tulips on one of the panels would be consistent with about 1637, the peak of 'tulip mania'. The Bottesford font is considerably more elaborate than the one at Muston, reflecting the high status of the Manners family.

However the decoration was not admired by all. In 1908 Francis Bond wrote:

... hanging would not be good enough for those who wrought the fonts of Tuxford and Bottesford.



Orston font.

Tuxford is in the north of Nottinghamshire and originally straddled the Great North Road; the A1 now bypasses the centre but still divides the settlement. The only photograph of the font online appears to show a plain octagonal design, although with an exceptionally elaborate wooden font cover. Plans to visit have been postponed by the ongoing travel restrictions.

Bond, although disapproving, implies a 1660s date for both Bottesford and Tuxford. At the time Charles Read, born in Tuxford in 1604 was a wealthy benefactor and may have sponsored the font and cover before his death in 1669.

Despite Bond's tactless linking of these two fonts, the lack of other similarities between Bottesford and Tuxford does nothing to refine the date for the former.

Orston

To the west of Bottesford and still quite close to Muston, but the other side of the border between Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire is Orston. Despite visiting this village nearly every week for the last three years attempts to look inside the church proved fruitless as it was always locked. However I finally ventured within on 15 September last year because preparations were underway to screen the Last Night of the Proms. Shortly afterwards the tower began to lean away from the nave and sadly the church is now always shut.

Once I set eyes up the font I realised that Orston churchwardens were playing 'keeping up with the Jones' with Bottesford. Or was it the other way about? Not because the design of the Orston font has the 'wedding cake confection' design which Bond thought so objectionable. But because one of the panels depicts a vase of tulips (see next page).

And, most helpful of all, there was a dedication. Dated 1662.

If tulips were still in fashion in Orston in 1662 then there is every probability that they were still in fashion in Bottesford at this time too.



Orston font.

Which confirms Bond's provisional dating of the latter font.

Anyone come across any more seventeenth century fonts in the vicinity of Bottesford? Or elsewhere?

My thanks to Neil Fortey for instigating this series of discoveries.

sources

Fonts and Font Covers, Francis Bond (Henry Frowde 1908) p265; online at archive.org/details/fontsandfontcov00chargoog

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tulip_mania

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuxford



More information about Project Gargoyle and the LARC Project

is online at

www.hoap.co.uk/gargoyle.htm

Videos about Leicestershire and Rutland's carvings

If you're struggling for something to watch then early 2018 I prepared three videos based on the lectures I have been giving since the early 1990s.

- ❖ Introduction to Project Gargoyle
- ❖ Introduction to the Medieval Carvings of Leicestershire and Rutland
- ❖ Understanding Leicestershire and Rutland's Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque Carvings

Links to all these and several more videos about aspects of Leicestershire and Rutland are here: **www.hoap.co.uk/index.htm#productions**