

AN IMPORTED MEDIEVAL PURBECK MARBLE FONT RECENTLY FOUND IN RYDE: ITS CONTEXT, ITS COUNTERPARTS AND ITS COASTAL SHIPMENT

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Abstract: Two octagonal fonts of Purbeck 'Marble', decorated with low-relief arcaded panels of Early Lancet style, are specifically discussed. These are compared with further Wight fonts and other medieval imports of this prestigious stone. The early production of these fonts on the Isle of Purbeck is discussed and a single source is postulated. Analogy is drawn with Wight's shipment of Quarr Stone and an implied similarity in the use of 'quarr-house' workshops in Purbeck and Wight. General contemporaneity is postulated between the arrival of these decorated fonts and the construction of Early English nave arcades in seven Island churches.

Keywords: Purbeck Marble, church fonts, medieval sculpture, Quarr houses, de Redvers, Norman-Gothic transition

The context of the Ryde font

In the autumn of 2022, a Purbeck Marble font of Late Norman style was found abandoned under a staircase in the Neo-Gothic church of St Thomas, Ryde. (Fig.1)



Fig. 1: The abandoned Purbeck Marble octagonal font as found in St Thomas's church, Ryde, in October 2022.

When this church was erected in the centre of this seaside town, in 1826, it replaced a chapel that had stood on this site since 1719 (Fig. 2). Prior to that date, the occupants of the minor coastal community of Ryde had been obliged to make frequent nine-



Fig. 2: Ryde chapel depicted in 1825. (After McInnes, 1990)

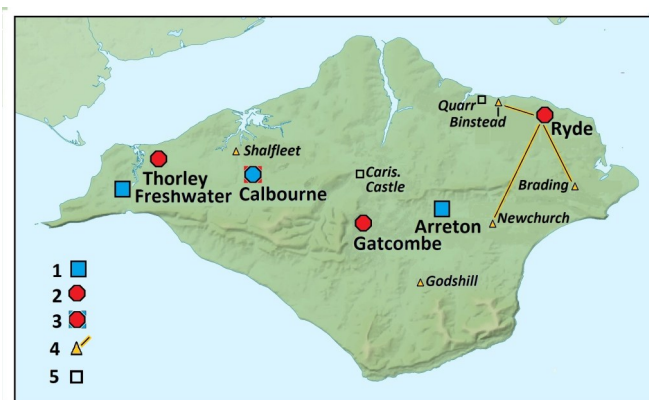


Fig.3: The location of Wight's Purbeck Marble fonts and some related medieval church components of this imported stone. 1 = square font; 2 = octagonal; 3 = square to octagonal conversion; 4 = possible original possessors a Purbeck font including the Ryde font (arrowed) 5 = other imported Purbeck Marble sculpted stonework

mile journeys to the church of their mother parish at Newchurch (Fig. 3).

With little evidence of any greater antiquity for the Ryde chapel, it is difficult to perceive a direct association between this Norman font and the church history of this Victorian town (Stone, 1912, 177-178; Lloyd & Pevsner, 2006, 225-227). Having been furnished with a substantial stone monopod font of contemporary Neo-gothic style, the church of St Thomas had no obvious need for a font of such antiquity.

The geological source of the font

The Purbeck Marble composition of the Ryde font can be readily matched with an array of analogous medieval fonts quarried or mined from a confined facies at the junction of the Jurassic and Cretaceous limestones in and adjacent to the Isle of Purbeck (Arkell, 1947, 133-138; Thomas, 1998, 53-64 & 2008, 72-75; Béneult, 2022, 13, Fig. 17). It is here that the working of this particular limestone stratum, traditionally dubbed 'Purbeck Marble', claims a long history.

First exploited in Romano-British times, Purbeck Marble was still mined by traditional methods in the early decades of the twentieth century (Benfield, 1990, 11-14). The adjacent limestones have long provided a range of attractive building stones, some of which are still quarried in the Dorset districts of

Purbeck and Portland. Confined to the Isle of Purbeck, the 'marble' stratum has been progressively found to be thin and elusive.

Since medieval times the 'marble' has been mined in Purbeck, mostly by means of inclined adits. These generally descended at some 45° while pursuing the marble stratum to a depth of some 30m. These adits also gave access to lateral galleries, colloquially named 'lanes'. On occasion, a maximum thickness of 1.2m had been encountered in the marble seam. This could provide for a font, a coffin, or for 'drum' segments for robust architectural columns. Later, the common thickness seldom exceeded 0.3m and by the 1930s the seam was effectively exhausted (Arkell, 1947, 134-135; Benfield, 1990, 47-50).

The work of Norman 'marblers'

The Ryde font shares its form and decoration with a notable body of similar Purbeck Marble fonts scattered across the southern counties of England (Leach, 1978, 81). These attest to a time when a thick and rewarding portion of the marble stratum was being successfully worked somewhere on the Purbeck Limestone outcrop. Current indications point towards the parish of Corfe where the well-known Norman castle was one of the earliest to be constructed in the immediate aftermath to the Norman Conquest. Once quarriers and stonemasons had assembled for this task, here was ready opportunity to expand and develop the Purbeck marble industry.

Diverse evidence of marble carving in and around Corfe village has been helpfully reviewed in studies by Dru Drury and John Blair. These embrace documentary evidence concerning craftsmen or 'marblers' whose architectural products were being shipped to Canterbury, London, Norwich and Durham before the close of the twelfth century (Dru Drury, 1949; Blair, 2001, 49).

Although some heavy architectural components are sometimes identified in early documentation, we have yet to find mention of fonts. The simple decoration and uniformity of these particular items seem suited to a single source where production may have been promoted by the good fortune of locating a particularly thick and accessible marble seam.

While Corfe may have accommodated a community of marblers, raw supplies of this stone could be won from a broader area of the outcrop. Medieval workings were once found at Swanage (Peveril Point), and individual pits trailing westward from Oakridge, Wilkswood Farm, Quarr, Downshay, Woodyhyde Farm and Lynch, to Blashenwell Farm near Kingston (Béneult, 2022, 13, Fig. 17). Other workings, of less specific date, have been cited by Arkell at Orchard, Church Knowle and Lulworth (*ibid.*, 134-135).

In his autobiographic account of much later stonemining, Eric Benfield describes some of the 'quarr houses' of Purbeck, where skilled stonemasons prepared commissioned products. These workshops were sited on a quarry floor or in close vicinity to a mine.

On Wight, the favoured 'Quarr Stone' stratum of the Bembridge Limestone Formation was apparently

worked in much the same manner in Norman times. It is interesting to see that the highly localised source of Wight's fine shell-brash limestone was known by the same regional and functional name as on Purbeck. Today, on Wight, the name 'Quarr' is only retained by the abbey.

The style of Wight's early fonts

Writing in 1928, Edmund Tyrrell-Green produced a valuable typological guide to the complexities of England's profusion of baptismal fonts. (Tyrrell-Green, 1928). This offered a welcome advance from earlier and more eclectic studies by Frederick Paley (1844) and Francis Bond (1908).

The 1928 study encompassed 1,047 fonts in England and a further 124 in Wales. From this, it became clear that most pre-Conquest fonts were of tub-like or cylindrical proportions. In early post-Conquest times, the size of these tubs or cylinders reduced as Norman baptismal ritual favoured simple wetting rather than thorough immersion. In response to this change, the traditional tub form became smaller and was then mounted on a central shaft or pillar. On Wight we find a single example of this in the church of St John the Baptist at Niton (Fig. 4). Fashioned in local sandstone, here, it seems, is the oldest of all of the Island's surviving fonts.



Fig. 4: Wight's earliest font? Niton's sandstone tub font was probably installed before 1071.

As change from Anglo-Saxon immersive baptism progressed, we find Early Norman fonts of round or square form similarly mounted on a central pillar. A further step in this progression is evident when the round or 'cup-like' form is complemented by polygonal variants. Amongst these, the octagonal bowl holds almost total domination. Preference for this form then endured over a long period (Tyrrell-Green, 1928). For the stonemason, these faceted fonts were probably much easier to produce, as



Fig. 5: Ryde's octagonal Purbeck Marble font displays its early lancet panels.



Fig. 6: The Purbeck Marble octagonal font in the church of St Olaf, Gatcombe, IW. (Note the bedding plane crack)

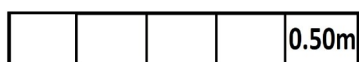


Fig. 7: Thorley's plain octagonal Purbeck Marble font bound by its iron repair.

curvature templates could be set aside. Here, at last, we come to the form of the Purbeck Marble fonts we

see on Wight at Ryde, Gatcombe and Thorley (Figs. 5-7).

Tyrrell-Green also notes two rare instances in which Norman square fonts had been converted to



Fig. 8: Calbourne's Purbeck Marble font. A square basin subsequently sawn and chiselled to octagonal form



Fig. 9: Another face of Calbourne's converted Purbeck Marble font.

octagonal form by the removal of their corners. To his two East Anglian examples at Shepreth and Thetford, we may now add the similar conversion we see in Wight's formerly square font at Calbourne (Figs. 8-9).

For early fonts composed of the hard fossiliferous limestone won from the Purbeck quarries and mines, we may look to a most helpful investigation pursued by Rosemary Leach (1978). From the medieval quarr houses on the Purbeck Limestone outcrop, she traces a nationwide scatter of at least 191 Purbeck Marble fonts (Figs. 10 - 11).

When we view the total distribution of octagonal fonts in Fig. 10, it appears that the London industry was probably responsible for the high concentration of arcaded fonts of this kind that were fashioned for recipients along the East Anglian coast. There is a perceptible distinction in many of these East Anglian fonts where the arcaded panels are emphatically Gothic in style. Being narrow and particularly pointed, these, it seems, may characterise some of the London workmanship.

In this current discussion, the overall array of Purbeck fonts may be generally divided into those that are square and those that are 'polygonal' (Leach, 1978). The latter embraces both

octagonal forms (102) and hexagonal ones (5). This list now includes Wight's octagonal fonts at Ryde, Gatcombe and Thorley. On Wight, there are also Purbeck Marble square fonts at Arreton, Calbourne and Freshwater (Figs. 8, 9 & 12-15).

The subsequent study by John Blair (2001) now indicates that some of these were fashioned by a second group of craftsmen using raw marble shipped from Purbeck to royal workshops near the Westminster waterfront in London (Blair, *ibid.*, 45-50). These, it seems, were émigrés from Dorset (Thomas, 1998, 63)

The known medieval output of Purbeck Marble fonts

(after Leach, 1978, with Isle of Wight additions)

Square fonts	93
Octagonal fonts	102
Hexagonal fonts	5
Miscellaneous font fragments	15+ Godhill?

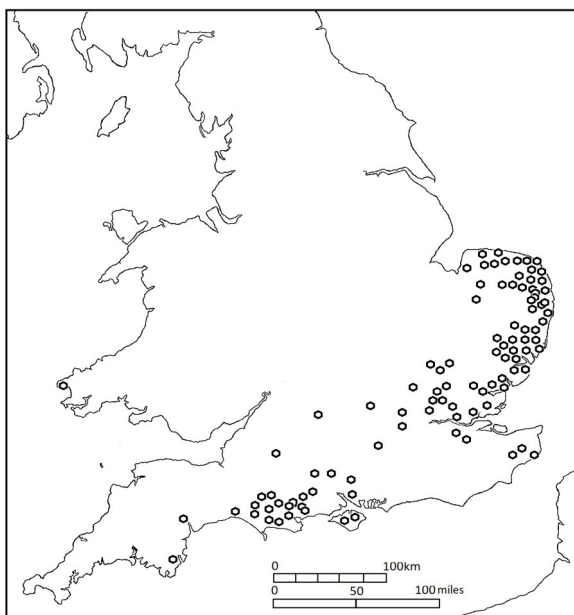


Fig.10: The distribution of octagonal Purbeck Marble fonts. (Adapted after Leach, 1978.)

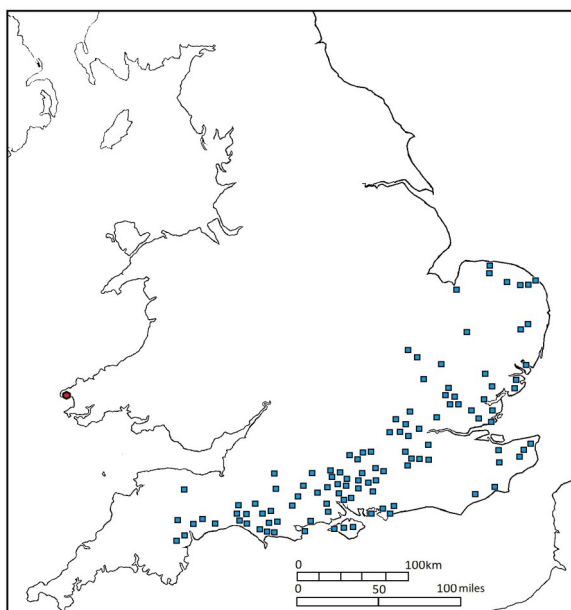


Fig.11: The distribution of square Purbeck Marble fonts. (Adapted after Leach, 1978.)

Wight's surviving fonts of Purbeck Marble

In addition to the three octagonal examples now identified on Wight, further Purbeck Marble fonts bring the Island's total to six. At Arreton and Freshwater, the surviving square fonts are fragmentary. At Calbourne, we have already noted a square example that has suffered crude conversion to octagonal form. There are, moreover, other Purbeck Marble imports that deserve our attention. At Godshill, some fragments of free-standing Purbeck Marble shafts, recovered in 2022, are



Fig. 12: A significant corner fragment of the original Purbeck Marble font in St George's church, Arreton.



Fig.13: The Victorian replacement font at Arreton displays a round-arched arcade replicating the decoration of Arreton's earliest font.

possibly suited to the supports of a further font. These pieces were found during building groundworks some 70m downhill from the church. Their archaeological context might possibly accord with internal changes inside this church before or during Reformation times (Tomalin & Trott, 2022, 66-70, Figs. 7a, 7b & 8). Godshill's present font appears to be a post-Reformation acquisition.

At Shalfleet, generous use of Purbeck Marble was once made when constructing the piers of the south arcade of the nave (Fig.18). This appears to be an installation of late thirteenth century date (Stone, 1911, 275-276). In the south aisle, two fine grave-slabs of anonymous Norman knights attest to further use of this prestigious Dorset stone.

In the grass near the church porch, a 'drum' of local Bembridge limestone, pierced with a central hole, apparently attests to the discard of the pedestal of Shalfleet's earlier font. Whether, like the nave arcade, the lost font basin was a further Purbeck import to the Island, we are simply left to ponder.



Fig.14: The replacement font bowl and shafts of Freshwater's font are set on the original Purbeck Marble.

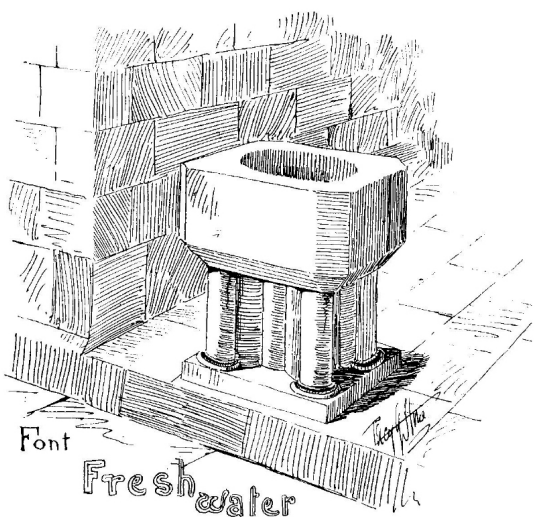


Fig.15: Freshwater's font, sketched by Percy Stone before the replacement of its bowl and shafts in 1875-76.

Dating the Ryde and Gatcombe fonts

The dating of the two virtually identical fonts from Ryde and Gatcombe rests on analogous examples emanating from the Purbeck Limestone outcrop. When the 102 examples were mapped by Rosemary Leach in 1978, these revealed some perceptible distinctions in their scatter across the southern and south-eastern counties (Fig. 10).

In the Hampshire church of Colemore (Leach, 1978, 70) and in the Dorset churches of Lodors, East Stour, Hilton, Tarrant Hinton and Tarrant Monkton, we find square fonts of Purbeck Marble each exhibiting shallow, blind, round-headed relief panels. These panels convey the outline of traditional round-centred Norman arches (RCHME, 1952, 1972 & 1975).

In the Dorset churches at Lydlinch and Shapwick, we find that our Purbeck marblers have employed similar Romanesque imagery on some of their octagonal fonts when pairing arched decoration on each face (RCHME, 1970a, 136-137 & pl. 26 (2);

RCHME, 1975, 58-59). At Lydlinch, the maker's interest in linking these panels into an arcade is particularly emphatic where a depiction of round-headed arches spills across the corners of the font from one face to another (RCHME, 1970a, *ibid.*).

At Purbeck, we do not have to look too far away to identify appropriate sources of contemporary artistic inspiration. These we find at Christchurch and Winchester, where robust round-headed nave arcades still line these grand church buildings. Here is Romanesque design befitting the tastes of both architect and font-artisan, yet these preferences are unlikely to have outlived the twelfth century.

On most of Purbeck's exported octagonal fonts, we find blind arcaded panels showing peaked arches that conform to Early English style. On a number of these fonts, these panels depict relatively shallow arch tips of the kind we see at Ryde and Gatcombe. Across southern England, however, the panels on these octagonal fonts can often be further narrowed and sharpened in full recognition of the advance of the Gothic Lancet style.

If we accept that the pointed arch did not arrive in England until French design was employed at Canterbury and Westminster in the last quarter of the twelfth century, we are offered a baseline for the stylistic dating of Wight's two arcaded octagonal fonts. When these were fashioned in a Purbeck quarry house, it seems that Gothic influence may have been at a relatively early stage. How might this be imparted?

Just 17km north of Corfe and the Purbeck Marble outcrop, some primary inspiration may have been drawn from the impressive Norman church of Wimborne Minster. Here we find a nave arcade with drum piers composed of imported Caen Stone (DBS, retr. 2025). These robust columns and their early Gothic (Lancet period) arches have all been attributed to a Norman rebuilding phase. This, on stylistic grounds, has been dated to 1170-1190 (DBS, *ibid.*). Here, before the close of the twelfth century, it seems that the advance of lancet arcading into south Dorset may have been facilitated by the shipments of Caen Stone from Normandie (Normandy). As the Gothic arches rose in Wimborne and Christchurch, a 'Transitional' response in the marble pits of Purbeck was surely inevitable.

Back on Wight, the modest lancet panels we see on our two octagonal fonts offer an attractive comparison with the early Gothic arcades we see in our Island churches at Arreton, Brading, Brighthstone, Carisbrooke, Freshwater, Northwood and Whitwell. When we are reminded that all of these late twelfth century structural arcades of rotund piers and modest pointed arches are a recognisable Island type (Lloyd & Pevsner, 2006, 19), it appears that something much more than a few random imports was then afoot amongst congregations and benefactors in post-Conquest Wight.

Pursuing the earlier provenance of the Ryde font

When seeking the original home of the Ryde font, there are several possibilities. These have been mapped in Fig. 3.

Ryde is an implanted resort town, a Victorian imposition on the Solent coastline of the mother

parish of Newchurch. The mother church at Newchurch is cited as early 1071 when it was gifted to the monks of the Normandie abbey of Lyra (Stone, 1891, 25; Hockey, 1970, 13-14). This makes the church at Newchurch a potential and appropriate custodian of a Norman font.

Today, a visitor arriving at Newchurch will find a Victorian font holding cuckoo residency within this ancient medieval building. This raises the possibility that, within the boundaries of the old parish, Newchurch's earlier font may have been relegated to the peripheral chapel at Ryde. Unfortunately, no supportive documentation has been traced.

Just 1.6km west of the font's present location is the twelfth century church of Binstead. In Norman times this church had served the stone-working community of Quarr. Some of the ancient stonepits of this parish can be found within 200m of the church. As quarriers, hewers and shippers of stone, the Binstead community and its monastic neighbours in the Cistercian abbey of Quarr were particularly well placed to take possession of high-quality imported Purbeck stonework. Not long after their arrival in 1132, the monks of Quarr were importing Purbeck Marble components for the construction of their abbey church and its attendant claustral buildings. Although a Cistercian abbey would not seek to accommodate a font, its adjacent parochial church at Binstead would certainly have such a need. Here was a ready opportunity for a commissioned Purbeck font to be shipped to Quarr and carted the short distance to Binstead.

In 1846, Binstead church was extensively remodelled. The original chancel arch was then demolished and the nave restructured. Like the arrangement at Newchurch, we now find, in the west end of the nave, a further Neo-Gothic baptismal 'cuckoo' appropriating the place of Binstead's original and absent font. Whatever happened to the earlier font is unknown, yet Ryde's church of St Thomas was only a very short cart-ride away.

A further potential source of the Ryde font might be postulated in the neighbouring parish of Brading. Here, the church of this medieval port/borough still retains some upstanding structure attributed to the late twelfth century (Stone, 1912, 167, plan; Lloyd & Pevsner, 2006, 91-95).

As the focal building within the town, this church was well placed to receive imported Purbeck Marble components shipped in from the Dorset coast. The only evidence we see, however, is a somewhat late Purbeck Marble tomb-slab installed for John Curwen when he was buried in the church in 1441. Inside this church, we find a diminutive octagonal stone font bearing the date 1631. Dates on fonts are very rare, and here we have been lucky enough to find a seventeenth century labelling, simply applied without a mason's chisel. Brading's earlier font displays a robust plain bowl with a scalloped basal bevel of Norman style.

As Puritan zealotry continued to flourish in the first half of the seventeenth century, an ejection of a traditional font could certainly suit contemporary prejudices. For some congregations, nothing larger than a small basin or even a simple cup could then

befit the ritual of baptism (Bond, 1908, 277). When the congregation of Lostwithiel ushered a horse into the church and baptised the bewildered beast as 'Charles', we see how strong a call for regnal and liturgical change could be in late Stuart times (Bond, *ibid.*). The unusually small and plain octagonal font in Brading church may be a further product of these post-Reformation changes.



Fig. 16: Brading's font with painted date of 1631 (on left facet).

Seeking a historical context

When dating Wight's octagonal fonts on stylistic grounds, we may consider Rickman's definition of 'Early English' workmanship (1817); this spans 135 years between 1172 to 1307. The simple points that tip the arched panels of the Ryde and Gatcombe fonts seem suited to a relatively early position within such a period. Since Edmund Sharpe (1851) recast Thomas Rickman's 'first Gothic style' by creating a primary 'Lancet Period' covering 1172 to 1245, this latter timespan appears to be more appropriate.

It was during this 'Lancet period' that the Isle of Wight found the lordship of its territory passing through three generations of the Redvers (Reviers) family, who held the earldom of Devon. A search for a triggering point for the importation of prestigious Purbeck fonts into Wight during these unpromising years is unrewarding. At Gatcombe, the foundation of the church has been attributed to the thirteenth century, but a specific date is lacking (Stone, 1891, 35; 1912, 248). The founder of this church is equally elusive, apparently being a member of the de Estur/L'isle family (Stone, 1912).

At Thorley, possession of the church lay in the hands of Christchurch priory. This church was standing in 1155, when its gifting to Christchurch was confirmed by Adeliz, widow of Baldwin de Redvers (Bearman, 1994, 4, Fig. 1; Hanna, 2007, 6). Given that Thorley's octagonal font is devoid of Gothic decoration of later twelfth century style, it seems possible that this plain font may have been commissioned and provided by Adeliz before her death in c. 1160. We know that some substantial Purbeck Marble items were already being shipped out of Dorset well before this time, because her father-in-law, Richard de Vernon (also known as 'de Reviers') had been laid to rest under a tomb cover of this stone when buried in the

Normandie abbey of Montebourg in 1107 (Béneult, 2015 & 2018).

In his review of Purbeck's medieval marble industry, John Blair assigns its principal production to the period 1170–1550. He also suggests that earlier marblers were at work somewhere in the vicinity of the Purbeck village of Corfe. Sited on the vital geological outcrop of the marble facies, it is here that a localised industry evidently flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Thomas, 1998, 63).

John Blair observes that the geographic spread of Purbeck Marble products is well marked by the distribution of fonts. When he attributes these large heavy products to the period 1170 to 1230, it seems that the simpler lancet panels may be virtually the only stylistic guide to the dating of their production.

Unfortunately, there are no inscribed dates or dedications on fonts of this kind; neither, it seems, are there any written commissions for these items. Helpfully, in Normandie, some specific dates confirm early shipment of heavy Purbeck Marble products, but these are not fonts.

Supplementing Richard de Revers' sarcophagus cover of 1107, we find further tomb covers datable to 1141 at Lisieux, and 1168 at Bayeux (Béneult, 2015, table 1). Closer to source, architectural components of Purbeck Marble were installed in Wolvesey Palace, Winchester, around 1141 (Thomas, 2008, 73).

Shipping the Purbeck products

In the approach to Poole Harbour, the seabed of the Swash Channel has now revealed the surprising presence of a thirteenth century 'Mortar Wreck'. Discovered in 2020, here is a lost cargo of Purbeck building stone and Purbeck Marble tomb slabs and mortars, all attesting to shipment in a craft with a dendrochronological date of 1242–1265 (Cousins, 2024).

Here, for the first time, we glimpse a consignment of Purbeck stone and marble exports shipped on a single occasion in a clinker-built craft that was probably in excess of 20m in length.

Now that this new and promising seabed investigation offers specific details of a particular shipment of Purbeck Marble, we might turn to more remote evidence to be found within no more than fifteen kilometres from the Swash Channel wreck. This has been provided by a medieval marbler completing an unusual commission sometime, it seems, in the thirteenth century.

Just some 7km north-west of Corfe, we find, in the Church of Lady St Mary, at Wareham, a substantial Purbeck Marble coffin. Attributed to the thirteenth century, this work resembles a full-round flat-bottomed craft similar in design to a single-masted Dutch *tjalk* (RCHME, 1970b), Fig. 16). Here, it seems, we may be glimpsing a type of craft well capable of delivering fonts, tombstones and all manner of heavy stone consignments to the havens and landings of Wight, and, indeed, much of the Channel and North Sea coasts.

Lost fonts and replacement fonts

A medieval stone font was essentially a one-off purchase, offering almost inexhaustible use. After a

flourish of some sixty years, it is unsurprising that medieval preference for lancet decoration should shift to other designs on fonts. On the Isle of Wight, however, we can ponder a revival. This arrives some six hundred years later when churchwardens and their architects, at Arreton and Freshwater, apparently sent to Purbeck while remodelling their churches and their fonts (Figs. 13 & 14).

At Arreton, the accuracy of the font's replication may ever tantalise us when we examine the scant surviving fragments of the original bowl (Fig. 12). At Freshwater, in 1894, a significant change was made when an original deep octagonal font bowl was replaced by a more elegant shallow, tabular version. The feet of the original remain *in situ*. Fortunately, Percy Stone, the Island's antiquary, had at least been busy sketching the medieval original (Figs. 14 & 15).

At Binstead, Brading, Newchurch, Freshwater and Shalfleet, Wight's medieval fonts are gone, yet Francis Bond, considering England more broadly in 1908, poignantly reminds us that the gardens of the local manor house or vicarage, the cattle trough and even the facilities within a rural public house can all be rewarding places to look.



Fig. 17: Boat-shaped coffin of Purbeck Marble recovered from the churchyard of the Church of Lady St Mary, Wareham. The attributed date is 13th century (RCHME, 1970b).

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APPENDIX

Summary of Wight's Purbeck Marble fonts

Arreton

Within the Late Anglo-Saxon church of St George. A square (tabular) font of Purbeck Marble has been replaced by a Victorian one of similar form, but not necessarily of similar decoration. A few random fragments of the former font have been collected together in the north aisle of the church. These confirm the presence of a round-headed arcade of shallow relief arches on at least one face (Figs. 12 and 13). This face is convincingly reproduced on the replacement bowl that now displays an arcade of seven arches. Of the other three faces of the font, one displays a row of four quatrefoil leaves and the second shows a pair of poised squares linked by a horizontal bar. The third face exhibits a pair of fish horizontally tiered in opposed directions. Sadly, the surviving font fragments now offer no convincing evidence for this attractive Victorian interpretation we see on these three other faces.

Calbourne

Within the medieval parish church of All Saints, a square font of Purbeck Marble has been converted to octagonal form by drastic sawing, chiselling and removal of its corners (Figs. 8 and 9). The central decorated portions of its four original faces still remain. Reconstruction of these panels is certainly possible. None show evidence of arcaded decoration.

Freshwater

A tabular font of Purbeck Marble was extensively restored by F. L. Pearson in 1894 (Lloyd & Pevsner, 2006, 140). The pristine font bowl and the supporting shafts are apparently his work, while a medieval base offers assurance of authenticity (Fig.14). The font's configuration closely resembles the tabular font at Arreton, but the four blank faces at Freshwater are uncharacteristic of a font of this type. Writing in 1891, Percy Stone sketched the original octagonal font. While it, too, was plain sided, it alternated between wide and narrow faces. The font bowl, moreover, was remarkably deep. Although the shafts have apparently been renewed, the feet were just as we see them now (Fig. 15; Stone, 1891, vol. 2, 34).

Gatcombe

At the west end of the parish church of St Olaf, this octagonal monopod font occupies a traditional position but is now, apparently, redundant. Its eight faces each bear paired identical Lancet-style arches executed in shallow relief (Fig. 6). The curvature and peaking of the configured arches is relatively weak. Damage on the rim has been crudely repaired with concrete and seems attributable to the removal of a formerly hinged wooden cover. This font and its rim damage is virtually identical to the font at Ryde.

Ryde

This font simply comprises a detached octagonal bowl discovered, in October 2022, under the staircase of the Victorian church of St Thomas (Figs. 1 and 5). Its presence and its concealment are both difficult to explain. Its style, proportions and its early Lancet decorative panels are all virtually identical to those at Gatcombe. This includes a damaged and

detached portion of rim that seemingly marks the removal of a former hinged and anchored cover.

Thorley

Sited close to the manor house at Thorley, a small stone church of 13th century date was demolished, for no good reason, in 1871. Its plain octagonal font, drawn *in situ* by Percy Stone, (Stone, 1891, vol. 2, 61–62) now survives in the Victorian replacement church in Thorley village. Here, it is now held together by a robust iron band (Fig. 7).

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Fig. 18: Purbeck Marble capital and 'drum' components in a 13th century nave pier in Shalfleet church.

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