

Manorfield Detectives.



St. Michael's Church Font.

You are probably very familiar with this object inside the church.

Font is an unusual word and it comes from the word 'fons' which means spring.

Originally, fonts were placed next to the main entrance to the church called the baptistry, today they may be elsewhere, just like in St. Michael's.

They were also big enough to fit the whole baby in, as they were fully immersed in the Holy water. Later in the Middle Ages it changed and only the head of the baby was bathed in the water.

It was sometimes the practice to only change the water in the font once a year, at Easter-yuk! This would have caused all sorts of issues. Disease was already a problem for people as they didn't yet understand how germs could be spread – especially through dirty, stagnant water. But that was a very long time ago and things are very different today.

In the year 1236, Edmund of Abingdon, Archbishop of Canterbury gave instructions for fonts

“let all baptismal fonts be kept under lock and key for fear of sorcery”

This was a time when people still had strong beliefs in witchcraft and evil spirits. This continued for a long time. Maybe they thought that the water was cursed rather than understanding that illnesses were caused by those germs they couldn't see.

If you notice, the font has a wooden lid, not the original lid; this dates to the 18th century, so some time in between 1700-1799.

The font itself is much older than that, possibly 13th century, so sometime in between 1200-1299.

The shape of the font is also significant, an octagonal (8 sided) font represents the resurrection or 8th day in Christian belief.

This is connected to Holy Week when Easter is celebrated, day 1 being Palm Sunday, day 6 is Good Friday and the final day is 8 Easter Sunday when Jesus was resurrected.

If you look closely, you can see that St. Michael's font is octagonal.

What can you discover about baptism and the use of fonts? Maybe you have a certificate of your own, or others in your family might have

one? Sometimes gifts are given at a baptism; maybe you or someone in your family has one of those?

There are more pictures below, on the second picture is a ewer, can you find out what a ewer is and how it was used?



This is what the font looks like under the wooden lid.



St. Michael's font and ewer.