

A GUIDE TO
KEMBLE
AND EWEN

KEMBLE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE
1951

LESTER NADAR

A GUIDE TO KEMBLE AND EWEN

FOREWORD

The object of this book is to show any who do not know Kemble that it is not merely a remote railway junction with an inexplicably good train service; and to make those who come here for the first time feel that they have been set down in a community that lives and flourishes with its roots in the past and its head in the future—one typical, we hope, of all that is best in English village life.

Kemble Women's Institute.

1951.

I.

THE main part of Kemble stands round a very rough square, with a road leading off at each corner. The square is placed more or less on top of a slight hill (for we are here in flattish, water meadowy country, not in the rolling Cotswold upland landscape) and the fine spire of the church is a landmark for a considerable distance round. The origin of the name is rather mysterious, but the early form seems to have been Kemele, Cemele or Chemele, and authorities agree that it is probably a Celtic word. The English Place Name Society in its volume for Wiltshire, in which county Kemble used to be, suggests that it may be derived from Camulos, the name of a Celtic war god. In any case the name originally belonged to a forest, the fringe of which extended to the site of the present village.

There is however some evidence that this forest was disappearing in Anglo-Saxon times, and now the only remaining trace of it is Kemble Wood on the road leading to Malmesbury. Fine trees are nevertheless a feature of the place to this day. Until recent times each of the four approach roads was lined with a fine avenue of elms, and a group of trees stood on the green triangle where the road from Cirencester climbs the hill and enters the village.

II.

This seems a good point from which to start exploring, for visitors who have come by train will arrive here by the road on the right leading from the station. But let us for a moment go back and approach Kemble from the direction of Cirencester, or we shall be missing something of interest; and while we are retracing our steps perhaps we may be allowed to go back in time also, and see the landscape through the eyes of Leland who journeyed along this road in the 16th century. He describes it as "Champagne Grounde, fruteful of Corne and Grasse, but very little Wood;" a century later John Aubrey describes Kemble as "set in a delicate campania," and the mental picture fits the scene today. But to return to the present. Before the road

begins to go up hill the branch line from Kemble to Cirencester crosses it on a viaduct; and before we reach the viaduct we shall cross the first bridge over the Thames. If we turn in at the gateway on our right and follow the course of the river across the Tetbury Road we shall come to Trewsbury Mead where the river rises. The only thing that marks the spot is T.H. (for Thames Head) scratched roughly on a tree: in summer there is no rushing or bubbling water, so the springs must be under the ground. Sometimes it comes out of an ancient well by the windpump which we pass on our right. In winter on the other hand one cannot get near the source for the rush of water. Here too is the old Thames and Severn Canal into which a pump used to raise water from the infant Thames. Between 60 and 70 years ago the donkeys used to pull the barges up and down the canal, taking coal and farm material to the outlying places; and not much further on, though not strictly speaking in Kemble, the canal goes through a tunnel nearly $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, the entrance to which is a most romantic spot. A charming old inn called the Tunnel House stands there too and must have been greatly needed, for the method of progression through the tunnel was to lie on your back on top of the cargo and push with your feet against the roof. If the load was not high enough to allow you to reach the roof, special wings were attached to the sides of the boat, and on these the boatmen lay and kicked against the walls of the tunnel. Those anxious about conditions of labour in former days will be glad to learn that time spent in recovery at the Tunnel House was included in your working hours.

After this shameless digression into the neighbouring parish of Coates let us hasten back to the Cirencester—Malmesbury road, passing Clay Furlong and the site of a Saxon cemetery, and enter our own village in an orderly manner.

III.

Kemble, though mentioned in Domesday Book, is not a village of ancient buildings or architectural treasures. Most of the houses are 19th century, and these are gradually being brought into line with a higher standard of comfort and convenience than was considered necessary in those days. They are however nearly all of the local stone. Old quarries abound; we passed a

large one on our left just before entering the village, but the art of stone cutting is falling into a decline. What is probably the oldest house still standing is on our right if we continue over the cross roads: it stands well back in its garden and is an attractive example of an English cottage. Inside it has several interesting features. In the course of recent alterations a staircase going up from the fireplace was found to lead to a small room, while a cupboard in the kitchen looks like the niche for a shrine: this suggests that the cottage may have concealed a priest in times of religious persecution.

At the far end of the green stands a quaint beehive shaped structure: this was built to give protection to the standpipe when piped water was first brought to the village. The attractive little house in the middle of the road was formerly the Post Office, and the smithy stood at the corner of the lane bearing left where the garage of a private house is now. Prayer Meetings used to be held in the smithy. The lane leads through to the church, and we shall be at the far end of it presently, by the War Memorial.

At the top of the hill the road known as West Lane bears right and goes out of the village in the direction of Malmesbury, leaving Kemble Wood (mentioned above) on its left and crossing Kemble R.A.F. station, now a maintenance aerodrome where many fine aircraft are to be seen landing and taking off. From here too went supplies for the attack on Arnhem in the second world war. Another ancient cemetery is said to lie up this road.

If we turn left from our original starting point—the cross roads at the corner of the green—two of the cottages on our left were formerly the School, and the last in the row was the old Police Station where the old cell and bars can still be seen. Continuing, we pass the present School on our left, and the Village Hall on our right, and next a branch of the Swindon Co-operative Society. Turning right, Church Road leads up to the Church and we follow it in a minute, but let us continue a few steps further. The view looking down to the left over the gently sloping meadow called the Piece with its fine line of trees makes a charming pastoral landscape. To the left of the Piece, the name Hall's Ground commemorates a family of that name who farmed this land and whose farmhouse is now the cottages we see below us. The gateway and drive on our right lead us up to

Kemble House which we shall see presently. The park would appear to have been the site of the village in earlier days; in times of drought lines of foundations can be made out, and the drive is made up of stone believed to have been got from old buildings on this site. Plaster and various building materials have been found on each side of the drive, but the old roadway was to the left of the present drive. Pitched stone can be found under the sward.

IV.

Now let us go back up Church Road. Its attractive gabled houses with the spire in the background are reminiscent of Samuel Palmer's charming painting in the Tate gallery of a Sunday evening village scene. The present Post Office, which is also a shop, and the smithy are on our right. The sub postmaster is also the blacksmith.

The memorial of those who fell in the 1914-1918 war, a graceful but dignified cross, stands at the tip of the hill and members of the Women's Institute take it in turn to keep it supplied with flowers.

The church, dedicated to All Saints, was, except for the tower and a small portion of the north wall of the chancel, entirely rebuilt in 1877, but care was taken to retain ancient features and to use the old stone again, and we are grateful for this as so many ancient churches virtually disappeared under the hands of drastic restorers. Kemble was granted to the Abbey of Malmesbury in 682 by Cedwalla, King of Wessex, so a church has probably stood here for many centuries. By local tradition the great yew tree by the tower dates from Anglo-Saxon times. A more recent legend says that Roundheads tied their horses to it in the Civil War. A later one still says that when the church was rebuilt, an embarrassed workman hid the bones he had unwillingly disturbed in the hollow trunk, following them up with his new false teeth—an act of propitiation—as he could get no rest. The tree is in any case interesting in its own right, as a new young tree has grown up inside the hollow trunk of the old one and fused into it at the top of the bole. Expert surgery has revealed this and prolonged the tree's life, we hope, for many years more.

The church of which the present building is a reconstruction was probably built between 1200 and 1250. Extensive researches into its history are at present being made, and we are unwilling to forestall their results with less well informed opinions of our own. There are certain features however to which we should like to draw attention.

The tower is of great dignity, and a number of 12th century coffin lids can be seen built into its walls. There is no structural staircase, and no internal communication between the tower and the church, the fine arch which can be seen in the east wall of the tower having been blocked up centuries ago, probably in the 16th century when the spire was added, in order to support the additional weight. On the S.E. and S.W. corners of the tower are two mass dials, used before the days when there was a resident priest, to show when mass would next be celebrated.

The porch is a handsome one, reminiscent of Salisbury Cathedral: it is said to have been added by William de Colerne, Abbot of Malmesbury. Notice the celtic cross over the inner door.

The South aisle is called the Ewen aisle, after the hamlet of that name which we shall visit presently. Tradition has it that it was built of the stone of a chapel which formerly stood at Ewen, but as the chapel was apparently still standing in the 17th century this seems unlikely. In the south wall is a recessed and canopied tomb, the canopy bearing heads which are probably portraits. The effigy of a knight with legs crossed at the knees and his feet resting on a wolf formerly lay under this canopy, though it does not seem to have belonged there, but was removed by a former vicar and placed behind the organ in the North chapel. John Aubrey, the 17th century antiquarian, records a tradition that the knight's name was Allam or Hallam, and remarks that there was a Robert Hallam, a cardinal and chancellor of Oxford University, who was Bishop of Salisbury in 1408. There are also two sedilia in this chapel, and the east window contains fragments of ancient glass.

The chancel was entirely rebuilt in 1877, with the exception of a small portion of the N. wall, and it is thought at present that its Early English appearance dates from that time.

The North chapel is rather congested as it contains the organ and is used as a vestry. The east window is of particularly charm-

ing design, and there is even a tradition that it was brought from Salisbury cathedral, though this seems unlikely. The organ, given by the parishioners in 1900 in memory of a former vicar, is an unusually fine one for a village church. Underneath this chapel is a vault containing lead coffins: when these were discovered two showed signs of having been ripped open with a pickaxe. The remains of the rood loft staircase can be clearly seen leading up from this chapel.

The North Aisle is quite modern. The font, which is the only piece of 14th century work in the church, now stands there. On the east wall in a small glass case is the key of the chapel at Ewen, which was handed over by a former owner of the Ewen estate.

The living of Kemble was united with that of Poole Keynes in 1937. The vicarage, down the lane opposite the church, was built in 1854: in 1840 the vicar was granted leave of absence owing to the dilapidated condition of his house, a curate having been induced to live there and take the services.

V.

Kemble House adjourns the church, but the entrance is up the drive mentioned above, though formerly it was approached from the lane continuing beyond the church. The site is an ancient one and the setting, with its sloping timbered park, is very lovely, but the present house, though of Jacobean origin, bears strong traces of the curious romantic Italianate style of a 19th century contractor named Billing whose initials appear both on the archway over the drive and on the Vicarage. Billing built the archway and the house adjoining it on our right looking down the drive: this house, formerly the lodge, was in use for some time as the estate office, and old pikes, muskets, powder horns, and bows were to be seen stored here. The stable buildings round the yard have been turned into private houses.

Kemble House itself is at the time of writing in a state of disrepair, having been unoccupied for a number of years. It and the estate were formerly the property of the Biddulph family, having been left to the 1st Lord Biddulph by a former owner Miss Anna Gordon. The house and estate now belong to Mr. S. J. Phillips who farms most of the neighbouring land. One

interesting feature of the house is a colony of bees which for more years than anyone can remember has made its home in the fabric of the house, only being discovered when the accumulation of honey began to drip through the ceiling.

There is no public thoroughfare here so this time we are technically trespassing and will do well to return to the lane outside the church gate. This continues past a pond on the left called Sowmere Pond, possibly originally South Mere. Also on the left and diagonally across fields is a spring which has the reputation of curing affections of the eyes. The lane is a charming one and eventually joins that from Poole Keynes to Oaksey, first running through the hamlet of Kemble Wick and crossing the county boundary into Wiltshire.

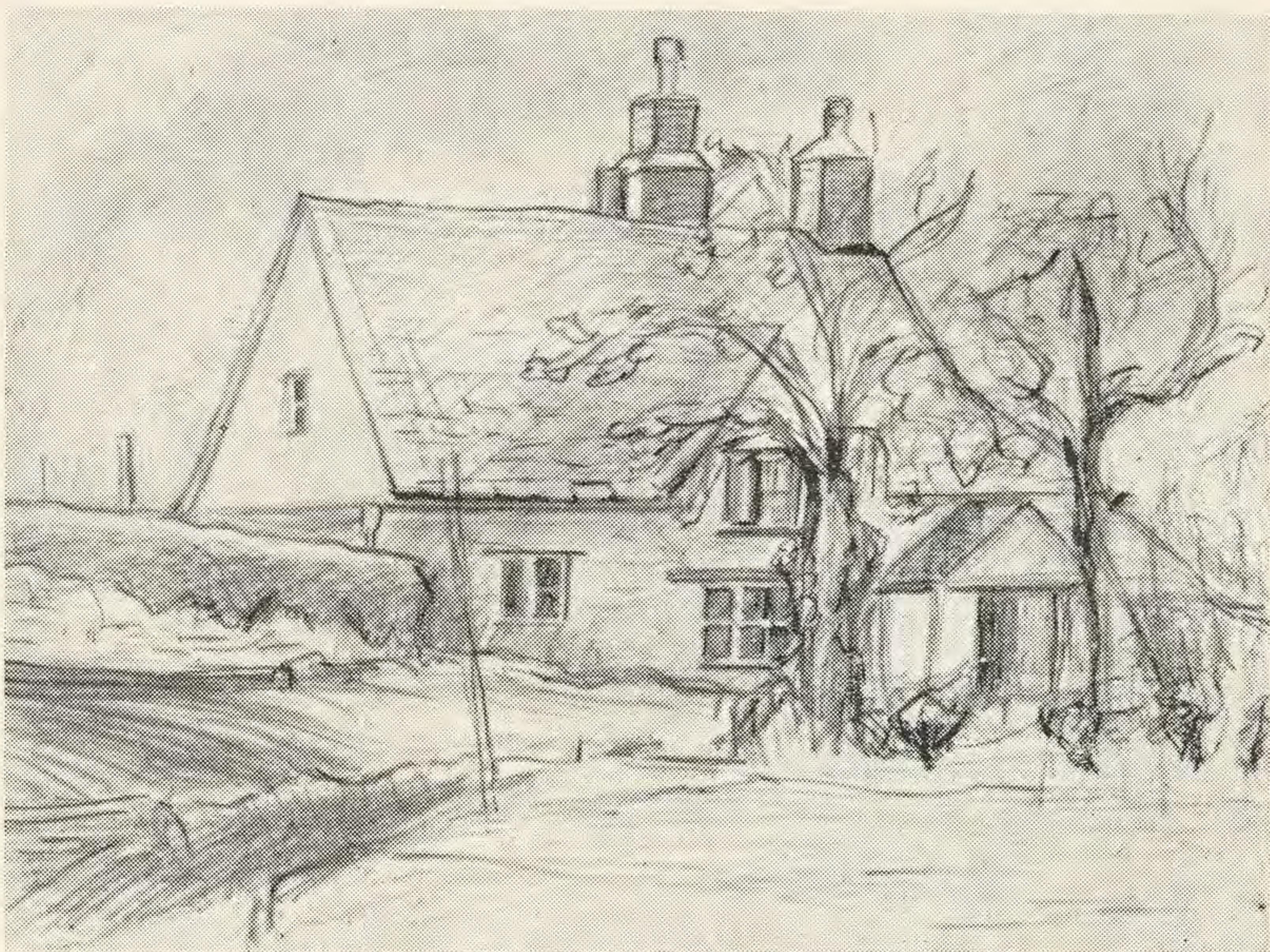
VI.

We shall now do well to return to the bottom of Church Road and take a walk to Ewen. Just beyond the entrance to Kemble House the road forks, the main branch bearing left down the hill and the other going more or less straight on along the side of Kemble Park: this is Washpool Lane and eventually joins the road between Ewen and Poole Keynes. The Kemble Methodist church stands a short way along Washpool Lane on the left. The attractive house in the angle of the two roads dates from 1660 and was once a malthouse.


To get to Ewen we go down the hill. Here the road bears right again, and soon we come to the second bridge over the Thames, known as Parker's Bridge though Parker's identity remains obscure. The river has become quite a respectable stream, unless it is undergoing one of its summer disappearances. Here may be seen an occasional kingfisher. The river flows parallel to the road and a pathway runs between them. This is known as the "Blue Arms"; the explanation seems to be that the path was made by the Gordon family whose coat of arms, predominantly blue in colour, formerly hung here. At the end of the path we come to Ewen Mill Farm, with a charming gabled farmhouse and some fine modern buildings. The river sweeps off behind the farm across the fields; but a former channel can be traced in the orchard, no doubt dating from the time when the



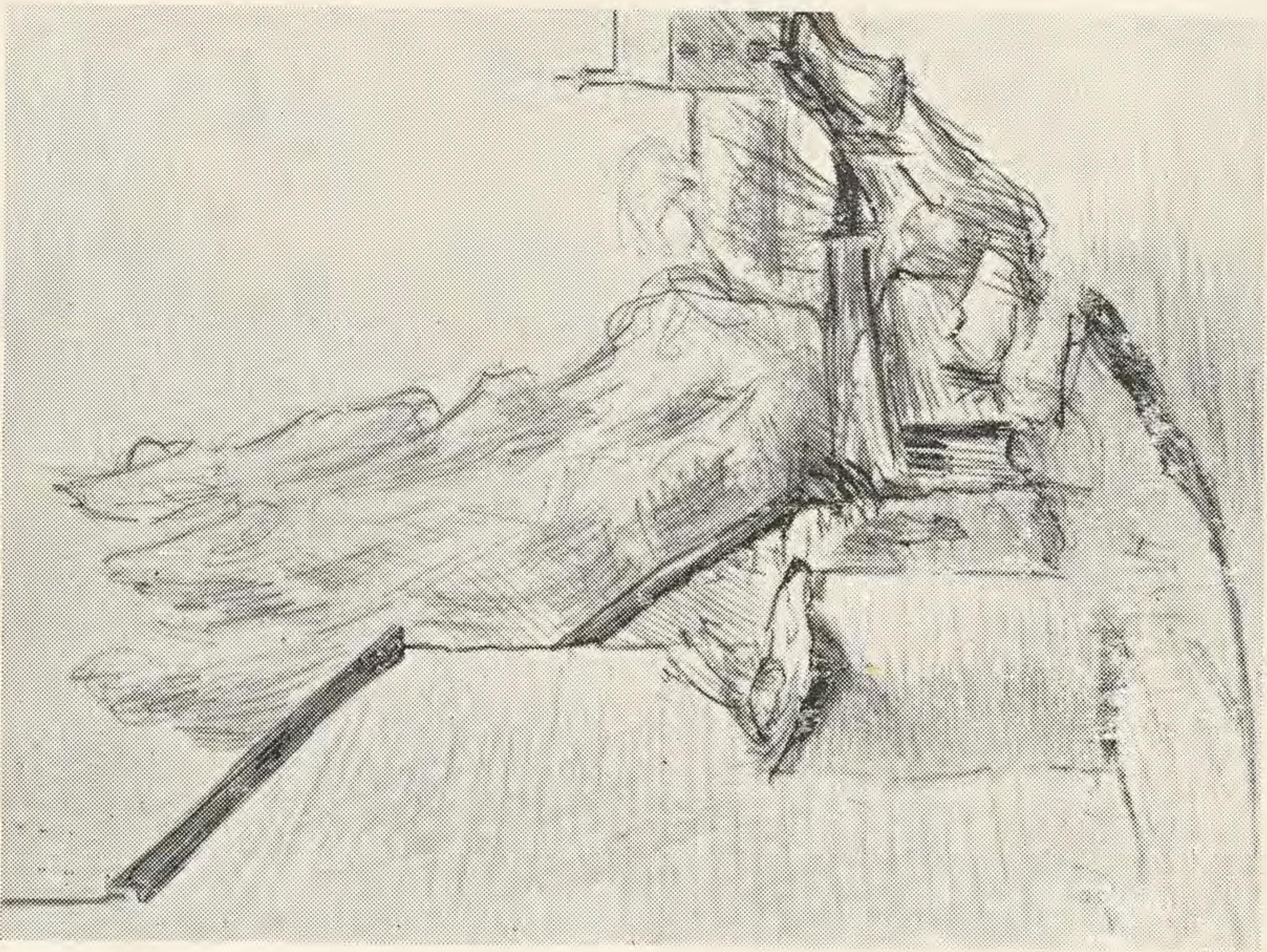
No. 2. Kemble from the north-west.



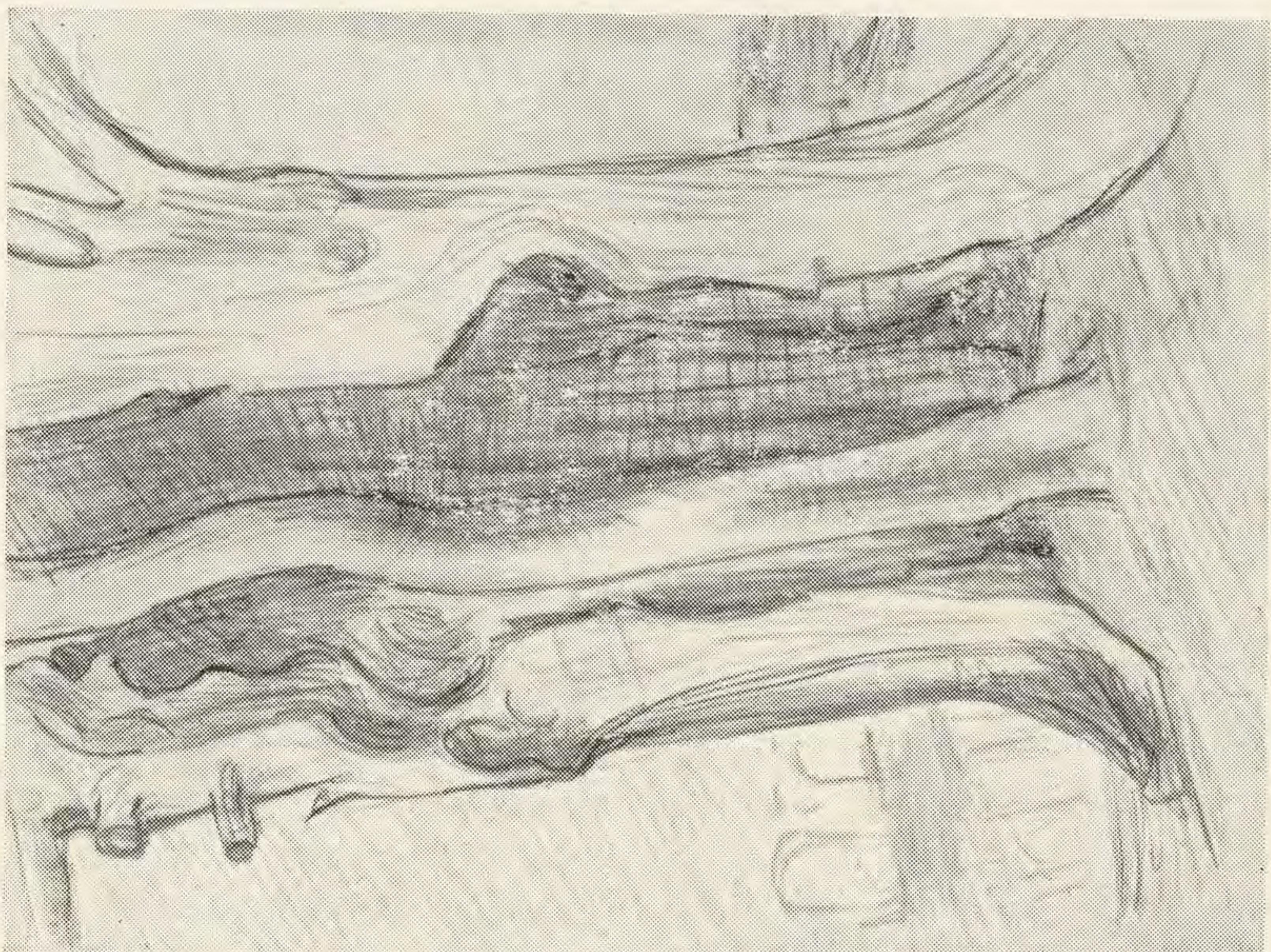
No. 3. Old cottage in Kemble.



No. 5. House in Ewen with staircase in turret.



No. 4. Kemble : The Churchyard Yew.



farm was a mill, as shown in a print dated 1792. At the time of writing excavations are going on in the field opposite the farm, just before we come to the cottages on the left of the road. Their purpose is to discover the history of a large upright stone found almost embedded in the ground by some electricity workers who were digging a pit.

A few hundred yards more bring us to the centre of the hamlet.

Ewen is not mentioned in Domesday Book, but its name is the Saxon Ewelme, a spring, and springs abound here still. In the centre of the hamlet the road to Poole Keynes leads off to the right; on the corner stands a fine 17th century house, formerly a farmhouse but now a private residence. Its barn flanks the road, and the house occupies another two sides of a square. A cottage on the other side of the Poole Keynes road shows an unusual external turret containing a staircase.

A little further on a road goes off to the left: it bends to the right and ultimately joins the road from Somerford Keynes to Cirencester, and forms the normal route from Ewen to the town. "Pearson's Lane" which goes straight on instead of bending to the right joins the road between Cirencester and Kemble: along both of these roads the Thames and Severn Canal is again to be met with.

Pursuing our way straight ahead instead of turning left, we catch a glimpse over a high wall on our left of the finely proportioned house now known as Ewen Manor though in the Ordnance Survey it appears as Elm Green. With this house went the whole of the Ewen estate until it was divided up for sale in lots in 1931. The original manor house stood on the far side of the river, which is now flowing parallel with our course two fields away to our right. The chapel mentioned in connection with Kemble church is believed to have stood somewhere on the right of the road. A vicar is said to have been instituted here in 1662, and there now seems to be some evidence that Ewen was once a separate parish. No one seems to know when the chapel disappeared, but John Aubrey writing about 1670 says of Ewen "I do not hear of anything of antiquity," which suggests either that the chapel had not long been built, or that it had gone since 1662, or indeed that Aubrey's informants were unreliable. This last may well be the case, for tradition has it that the pool fed by

a spring, near which the chapel apparently stood, was the fishpond belonging to Cirencester Abbey, and an ancient holy water stoup was found in Ewen in use as a chicken fount. It is now on a window ledge in the north aisle of the church.

Here where the road divides, the left hand branch leading to South Cerney, the right hand to Somerford Keynes, the parish boundary bids us retrace our steps. If we take the Poole Keynes road and cross yet another bridge over the Thames, this time quite an imposing one, we shall soon come to Washpool Lane on our right which will take us back to Kemble.

VII.

We have still to explore the road leading towards Kemble station, and this is a part where a good deal of development has taken place in recent years. Just beyond the corner a cottage on the left was pulled down which was found to contain a large oven and flues suggesting that it was once the village bakehouse.

On the right, opposite a turning which leads to the down side of the station, stands a group of cottages called Biddulph Cottages, which were built by the second Lord Biddulph to commemorate King George V's Silver Jubilee. These have been illustrated in "*Country Life*" as a fine example of the contemporary use of traditional design and material. Further along the road and lower down to the right Council Houses of various dates help to house a population which seems to be rapidly growing from the pre-war estimate of 500. At the far end of these on the left is a welcome fried fish shop, and a gate leading to a group of cottages. These are called Windmill Cottages, and here within living memory stood a windmill which ground wheat. The cottages were built with its stone when it was pulled down about 60 years ago. The road now goes down under the Kemble—Cirencester branch line, and a sharp turn left brings us into the station yard.

VIII.

When we come to Kemble station our feet are on firm ground; hearsay and legend are left behind, but not human interest or even humour.

In 1836 the Directors of the Great Western Railway Company (who had constructed the main line from London to Bristol) introduced into the House of Commons a bill for making a railway from Cheltenham to Gloucester to join the Great Western at Swindon, with a branch line to Cirencester.

Robert Gordon under his marriage settlement with Anne Coxe was tenant for life of Kemble Estate; he was also member for Dorset and Secretary of the Treasury, and was one of the land owners who opposed the Bill in Parliament, but later after obtaining various concessions sold the land to the proposed Company.

The long climb out of the Stroud valley to the Cotswold plateau made the construction of the railroad difficult, and in 1842 Robert Gordon was again to the fore: some of his objections (apparently unforeseen) were that the proposed railway line would divide his estate, and pass within 200 yards of Kemble House, and he was "apprehensive of the great annoyance caused by the passage of trains propelled by steam." This explains Kemble Tunnel: the "Cut and Cover Principle" was suggested by the eminent engineer Brunel to save the residents of Kemble House from such annoyance. The amenities of the countryside were also preserved by the railway company planting all embankments with trees and shrubs, and by undertaking never to erect a house of any description for the sale of alcoholic liquor on any land acquired from Robert Gordon or his successors. Hence the triangular void between the "up" platform and the Cirencester branch line, which seems just the site for a refreshment room.

After the sale of 54 acres, and some soothing of Mr. Gordon over the unpleasantness of engines letting off steam, the line was finally opened for traffic on June 1st 1841.

But Kemble station was not what we see before us now. Then, and for 30 years after, the station remained isolated without any public road or right of way. Beside the engine shed the only buildings were a small wooden construction for the station master and 2 porters, and a small waiting room. All passengers to Cirencester had to alight and herd into this tiny waiting room and await a branch line train from Cirencester. The night mail did not stop at Kemble but at Tetbury Road where horse drawn

carriages met the passengers. Kemble was not a public station; only members of Robert Gordon's family and establishment might use it on giving notice to the station master at Cirencester. The general public used the station at Tetbury Road; and the railway staff entered Kemble station by steps from the tunnel mouth and a path along the embankment, a privilege extended to the public about the year 1862.

The passenger traffic was continually increasing and demands were constantly made to the directors of the company for better conditions for travellers at Kemble station, particularly for a road to the station. Application to Miss Anna Gordon (Robert Gordon's only child and then owner of Kemble estate) was always met with polite refusal.

At last in 1879 one of the directors found himself with about 20 other passengers herded into the small shed to wait in bitter cold the arrival of the Cirencester branch train: this nearly brought about a loop line to the Tetbury Road station, but before anything was done, in March 1882, the principal land owners and residents signed a polite application to Miss Gordon asking if she would allow a "Road to be made from the top of Kemble Tunnel to the station." To this request Miss Gordon succumbed and directed her lawyer to do everything he could to carry out the wishes of her friends and neighbours in his negotiations on her behalf with the "Poor dear Great Western" as she invariably called the Company. She still stipulated that there should be no refreshment room for the sale of alcohol.

About this time Kemble village benefitted in another way from the presence of the "Poor dear" Great Western in its midst. The Guardians of the Poor for the Rural District of Cirencester approached Miss Gordon about the water supply in Kemble. The cottages' only supply being from surface wells, Miss Gordon's lawyer arranged on her behalf with the Company in addition to buying the land for the proposed new station, to lay a water main from the engine supply tank into the village with stand pipes from which the villagers could draw their water.

We cannot leave the railway without visiting the Tavern. This is at the entrance to the station on the down side, and was only opened in 1948, when Mr. Sam Smith the former proprietor obtained the first licence in the history of the village. (The Great

Western Inn on the Tetbury Road is not in Kemble) The occasion aroused so much interest that Mr. Smith was asked to broadcast in "Country Magazine." Mr. Smith had already lived in the house for many years running his garage, but his predecessor Mr. Strange had already used the premises for serving light refreshments and they were known as the Coffee Tavern. Here before the days of motor traffic came the midnight mail van from Cirencester drawn by a pair of horses, the sound of whose hooves must have thrilled many a waking child. The driver snatched some sleep at the Coffee Tavern before returning to Cirencester at 3 a.m.

X.

A short excursion beyond the station as far as the Tetbury Road will repay us. The Tetbury Road is the Roman Fosse Way, and we turn right along it passing the Great Western Inn, originally built to refresh drovers taking their cattle from Devon to the North. If we go through the second field gate on the right beyond the Inn and follow the direction of the road we come to a thicket, and here close by the road but not easy to find is an ancient boundary stone said to have been placed here by King Athelstan, and known to this day as Athelstan's Stone. Later hands have cut it into a mounting block.

XI.

We must now retrace our steps to the cross roads and return to Kemble. We dare not turn right and trespass again in Coates parish, so the deserted village of Hullasey which lies buried in a wood must remain unexplored, and the legend of the girl running away from service in the early hours of the morning who found herself confronted by a seven foot man in Roman armour must go uninvestigated. But we hope that by this time our visitors will be glad to remain in Kemble, and that they will want to extend these very superficial explorations on their own. We think they will soon find many friends to give them information.

It is so often said that villages in these days have no social life and that their inhabitants cannot while away their leisure without

the frequent bus service and the cinema. This is not true of Kemble: there are flourishing branches of various organisations, and two local concert parties who in the winter entertain not only Kemble but other villages over a wide area. Perhaps the fact that people here have varied occupations, a good many being employed by the railway while others are engaged in agriculture, helps them to exchange ideas and strengthens their common interests.

In any case we hope that those who visit us will return, and that those to whom we exist only by hearsay will be tempted to come and see Kemble for themselves.

CHURCHES	All Saints' Church. Kemble Methodist Church.
SHOPS . . .	H. Gascoyne, Kemble Post Office. (also smithy adjoining.) Swindon Co-operative Society. C. T. Bayliss, Fried Fish.
NEWSAGENT	E. C. Bayliss, 3 Biddulph Cottages. (also stall on station.)
GARAGE . . .	A. G. Ayling, Station Garage.
CARS FOR HIRE	A. G. Ayling, Station Garage. L. H. Townsend, Brookside Cottage, Ewen.
CARPENTER	W. O. Compton, Ewen

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3. *Old cottage in Kemble.*
4. *Kemble : the churchyard yew.*
5. *House in Ewen with staircase in turret.*
6. *Map of Kemble and Ewen.*

*All the illustrations except 1 are from drawings by a member of
Kemble Women's Institute.*

*Joan Boycott
Ewen Farmhouse*

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