

Ewen Chapel Location

Ewen was an Anglo-Saxon estate gifted to Malmesbury Abbey by King Aethelstan in 937AD. There is a boundary charter which can be found in three printed sources and discussed in two of them, (1, 7, and 8 see below).

There are references to a chapel in Ewen in the register of Malmesbury Abbey (1). Three references occur in 12th century papal acts. The phrase used is; 'ecclesiam de Kemela cum capella de Ewlma', that is 'the church of Kemble with the chapel of Ewen', it seems from this that the two were seen as being together as part of the same parish or estate. The earliest reference is 1145 – 53.

Reference to the chapel is found in the Itineraries of William of Worcester in the 1470's (2). 'The source of the first spring of the river Thames is close to Cirencester; it rises 3 miles from the town of Tetbury in Gloucestershire at Kemble, at a chapel called Ewen (Tewelle in the MSS) in that parish, and this spring never dries up in the greatest drought.' The only serious candidate available for this spring in Ewen is Bittenam/Bittenham Spring located in Ewen opposite the Wild Duck, see maps below. This interpretation would hold good today for anyone searching for the source of the Thames since in many summers the first "Thames" water comes from the outflow stream, from the spring, into the dried up course of the river.

The first detailed references to the location of the Chapel are in the Glebe Terriers for Kemble (3).

(Before the Dissolution of Malmesbury Abbey the tithes from Kemble Manor went to the monastery. At the Dissolution in 1539 the Great Tithes for Kemble were bought from the crown by a local family of landowners. This left the vicar of Kemble with the Great Tithes that came from the common field of Ewen Manor and were for the Chapel. In the Glebe Terriers all references are to the Ewen Common Fields. See Andrews and Drury Map below for location.)

The first mention of the chapel in the Terriers is in 1608;

"In Ewen a ruinous chapel standing in a plot of meadow."

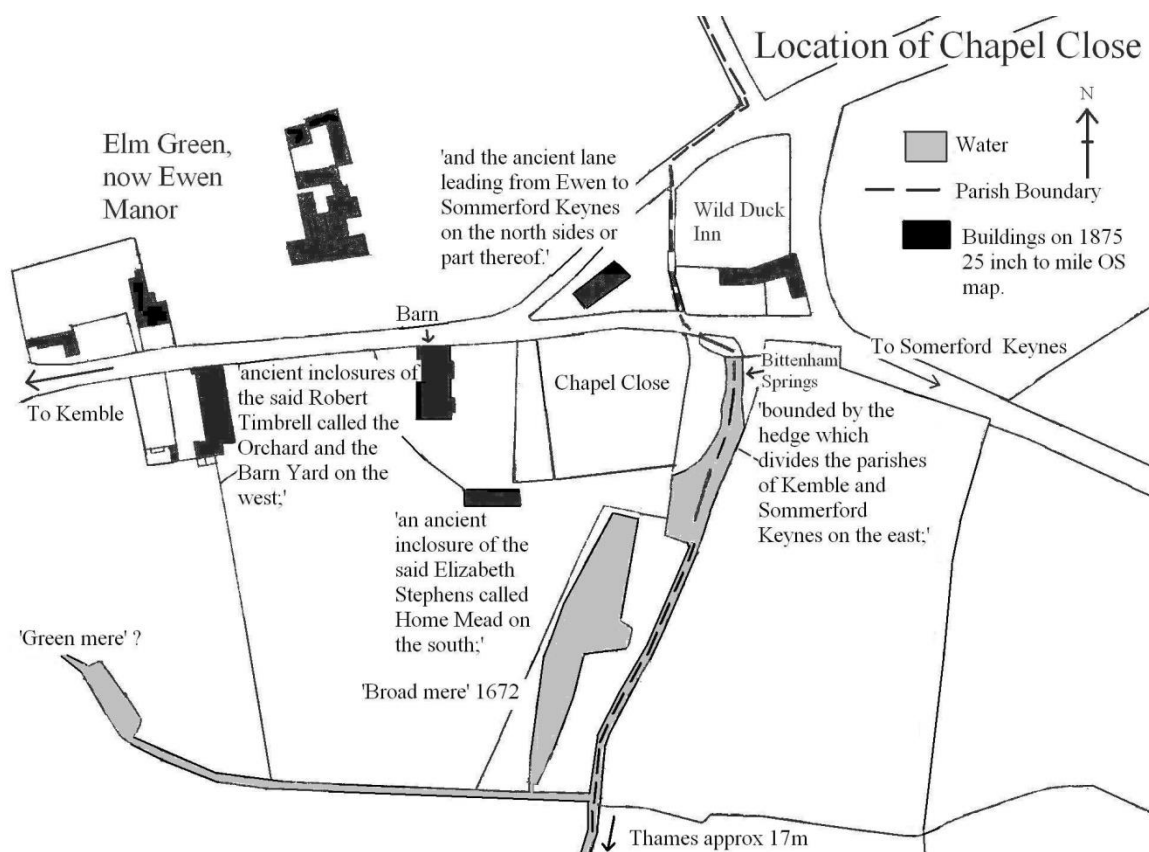
In 1672 there is a description of the location of the chapel.

"In Ewen a tything in the parish of Kemble has always paid all Tithes, corn, hay, wool, lamb etc. to the vicar of Kemble. There is a glebe counted for half yard land viz; a close of pasture containing about one acre & a half called Chappel Close in which are the ruins of an old chapel."

In the last glebe terrier of 1704 the ruins of the chapel are still mentioned, but this is the latest and last reference.

No maps so far found show Chapel Close, but there is a description of its location in the Enclosure Act of 1774 (4) "for the manor and parishes of Kemble and Poole". On Parchment 5, there is an exchange of land between the vicar of Kemble and Rebecca Timbrell and with it a description of the land to be exchanged.

"Chapel Close, situate in Kemble aforesaid, containing by statute measure Two acres and twenty two perches, bounded by the hedge which divides the parishes of Kemble and Sommerford Keynes on the east; an ancient inclosure of the said Elizabeth Stephens called Home Mead on the south; ancient inclosures of the said Robert Timbrell called the Orchard and the Barn Yard on the west; and the ancient lane leading from Ewen to Sommerford Keynes on the north sides or part thereof."



The map above, shows the boundary between Kemble and Somerford Keynes as it was before it was moved eastwards to its present position in the in the second half of the 20th century. There are two areas of water. The northern one is long and thin and has the parish boundary running through it, as shown. Here, springs issue directly from limestone at the base of a slope.

The modern name, Bittenam/Bittenham Springs, is difficult to trace back before the map of Andrews and Drury of 1773 (5), see below, where it's called Bitnum Spring. However the name for the area in Somerford Keynes Parish east of the springs is Bikenhulle/Bykenham.

Chapel Close has been located using three of the boundary indicators given in the Enclosure Act and given on the map. The northern and eastern boundaries are the

only possible candidates because the combination of the road to Somerford and boundary of the two parishes only occurs at this point. The western boundary refers to a barn yard and there still exists a good candidate for this in the substantial 18th century barn that's marked on the map. The southern boundary is marked by Home Mead which refers to meadow land. This fits the area where pasture slopes gently down to the Thames.

Why was the chapel there?

Ewen was an Anglo-Saxon estate gifted to Malmesbury Abbey by King Aethelstan in 937AD. St Aldhelm, an early abbot of the abbey, founded many churches in the area.

William of Worcester locates Ewen Chapel to what was acknowledged in the 1470's as the source of the Thames.

In 1983 when work was done by the Thames Water Authority on the bigger of the two ponds, a lot of Roman material was found. The Gloucestershire Sites and Monument Record reports; "Roman finds from disturbances in area of springs and stream included 87 coins, brooches, knives, buckles, lead rolls, various pieces of lead and animal bones (found by M Mallard in 1983)".

David Miles in his chapter 'Romano-British settlement in the Gloucestershire Thames valley' (6), says of Ewen, "springs providing a major source of the Thames emerge here. Large quantities of roman pottery, coins, metalwork and building material have been found over about 1-2ha. The nature of the site is uncertain but a ritual complex may have existed in such a position".

In the Roman world the places at the edge of ordinary life (springs, mountain tops, caves and the seashore) were the boundaries between the living and the dead and between the normal and the world of Gods and spirits. It is quite likely that a Roman shrine existed next to this significant spring. It is quite likely that when Ewen was gifted to Malmesbury Abbey in the Anglo-Saxon period the abbot, possibly St Aldhelm, decided to build a chapel there to remove any link with the old religion.

Summary

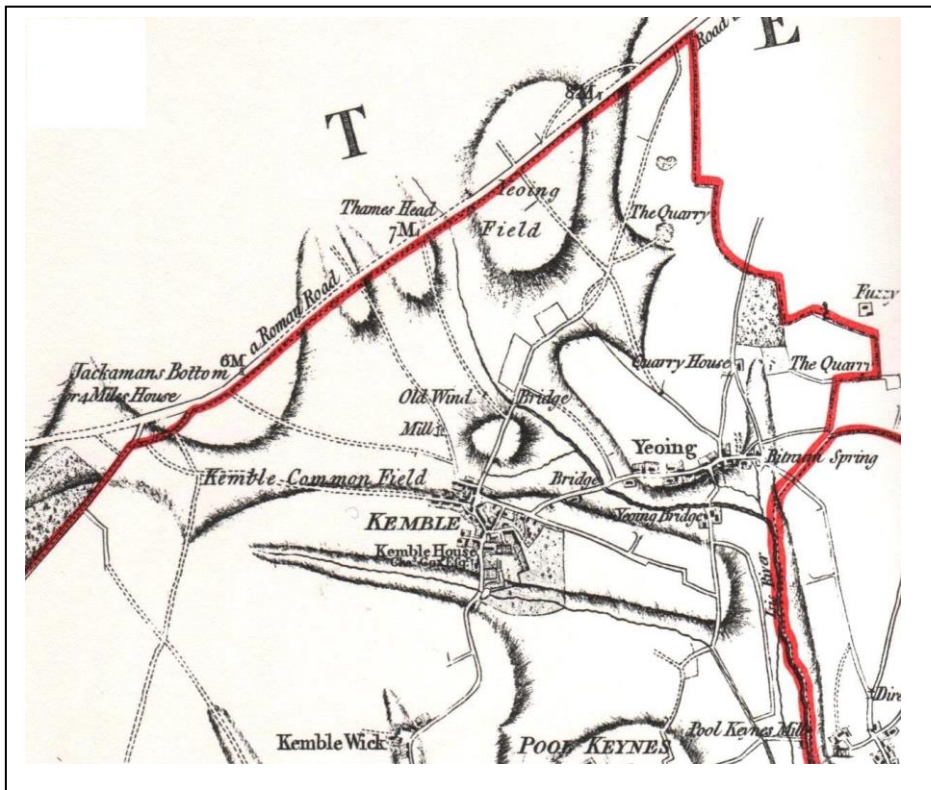
Bittenam Spring was the site of a shrine in the Roman period. Ewen became an estate of Malmesbury Abbey in the Anglo-Saxon period up to the dissolution of the abbey in 1539. The chapel was probably there in the 9th century but it could have been built before then.

In the 12th century a chapel at Ewen is mentioned associated with Kemble Church. In the 1470's, William of Worcester links the springs at Ewen with a chapel. In 1608 the chapel was in a field of 1 acre and it was 'ruinous'. In 1672 the chapel was in Chapel Close which is c.1½ acres.

It was still there in the last glebe terrier of 1704 but now described simply as ruins. By 1774 the field Chapel Close was 2 acres and 22 perches and there is no mention of a chapel. I assume by that date it had been removed.

References

- 1) *The Registrum Malmeburiense*, ed J.S.Brewer. 2 vols. PRO 1879,1880.)
- 2) *The Itineraries of William Worcestre*, Itinerary 205, ed J H Harvey. Oxford 1969. Shared with me by Dr Richard Reece.
- 3) These are in the Wiltshire Public Record Office, Kemble was in Wiltshire until 1897 and the parish was in the diocese of Salisbury. The six glebe terriers for Kemble printed in Volume 56 of The Wiltshire Record Society. (Hobbs, S. 2003. Wiltshire Glebe Terriers 1588 – 1827. Trowbridge.)
- 4) The fragile original of the Enclosure Act is in the Gloucestershire Record Office but I have used a transcription by the Rev Thomas Layng who was Vicar of Kemble from 1950 – 1955. His papers relating to Kemble are in the GRO/D1547.
- 5) Andrews and Drury, Map of Wiltshire 1773, the scale of 2 inches to the mile, sheet 17. Original copy in possession of the author but a reduced facsimile was published in 1952 by the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. See below.
- 6) *Romano-British settlement in the Gloucestershire Thames valley*, by David Miles. In *Archaeology in Gloucestershire*, ed Alan Saville Cheltenham, 1984.
- 7) *Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire* by G B Grundy, Bristol and Glos Archaeology Soc, 1936.
- 8) *Charters of Malmesbury Abbey* by S E Kelly, OUP 2005.



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