The village of Kempley is situated in the north west corner of Gloucestershire, about seven miles from Ledbury, the nearest station on the Worcester and Hereford line. The church, which is some distance from the present nucleus of the village, does not possess any special external attractions, but contains some of the most interesting mural paintings in the kingdom. It is dedicated to St. Mary, and is a plain Norman fabric, with a chancel, nave, and a west tower, a later addition, on which a slate cap now occupies the place of a former spire. There is a plain Norman doorway within the tower, formerly the western entrance to the church, but the present and only entrance is through a fine Norman doorway on the south side of the nave, within and partly concealed by a wooden porch. The arch over the door is ornamented with several rows of chevrons and a double row of pellet moulding, and on the tympanum is the tree of life, similar to that on the south door of Moccas church in Herefordshire. There is one shaft on each side unusually massive, and with an early foliated cap of a peculiar type, which also occurs in the chancel arch, and of which other examples exist at the neighbouring churches of Dymock and Pauntley, and at the churches of Bromyard and Thornbury in Herefordshire. Within the church with the exception of the paintings, the only ornamental work is on the chancel arch, which is a fine specimen of Norman work, and is enriched with the chevron and star mouldings. The windows with one exception are small, round headed, and deeply splayed, and on the north wall of the chancel is a plain aumbrey, or, as has been suggested, an early example of an Easter sepulchral recess. The church was restored in 1872, and
it was then, on the removal of the whitewash, that the numerous paintings about to be described were discovered, and, as far as possible, most carefully preserved.

On entering the church the first painting to be noticed is that on the west wall of the nave, on which are remains of blue letter Scripture texts, which date either from the latter part of the fifteenth or early part of the sixteenth century. In removing the whitewash in the nave two or three courses of colouring of various periods were discovered, but on account of the crumbling and rotten character of the distemper it was exceedingly difficult to discern the scheme of any particular subject. This is especially the case with a large painting on the south wall of the nave. It is much obliterated, and appears to be a jumble of more than one series. One subject seems to have been in compartments; in the lower part are two figures in armour, one holding out a sword; above their heads is a cross surrounded by rays of white light. It has been suggested that this subject represents the Conversion of St. Paul or the History of Constantine. Within the splay of a window, an insertion of the fourteenth century, on the south side of the nave, is the figure of an archbishop with a crozier. On the north wall of the nave is a large wheel with ten spokes radiating from the centre and terminating in as many medallions, within the outer circle. The subjects of the medallions, if any ever existed, are all obliterated. Similar wheels exist at Rochester Cathedral, at the west end of the original north aisle of the Priory Church at Leominster, and another one could be seen twenty years ago at Catfield in Norfolk but is now hidden by a fresh coat of whitewash. These wheels are commonly called "Wheels of Fortune," and must be distinguished from such wheels as those now existing at Arundel and formerly at Ingatestone and elsewhere, and exemplifying the Seven Deadly Sins. These Wheels of Fortune probably date from the thirteenth century. Within the splay of a Norman window, also on the north side of the nave, is, on one side an Archangel weighing a soul, with the Blessed Virgin Mary interceding on the soul's behalf, and on the other St. Anthony with his usual symbol of a pig; the figures are all as on tracings on a red ground, and appear to belong to the Norman period, though no
other example of the subject of an Archangel weighing souls treated in this particular manner, is known as belonging to so early a period. In the head of the arch is a pattern of blue roses on a white ground; on the south side of the chancel arch is a large figure of a Saint under a semicircular canopy, doubtless dating from the twelfth century; there was probably a corresponding figure on the north side, but here the plaster had been destroyed and a tablet was erected in the last century, which has now been removed. The mouldings of the chancel arch have been coloured in red, yellow and white, and the soffit of the arch is ornamented with alternate squares of red and white. Above the west face of the chancel arch is a diaper pattern of the Norman period, and above again and partly mixed with the diaper pattern, is a large and indistinct subject probably representing the Day of Judgment.  

Far more perfect and interesting than the paintings in the nave are those in the chancel, which will, it is hoped, be conclusively proved to be entirely of Norman workmanship, and to be the most perfect and brilliant specimens of colouring which we have remaining from that early period.

The chancel is small, about 20 feet by 12 feet, having one window on the East, North, and South, and a plain barrel roof. There is no ornamental moulding of any kind, which tends to prove that the painting of the ceiling and walls formed part of the design of the original building.

Those who have seen the better known paintings in the apsidal chancel of Copford Church in Essex will be struck with the numerous coincidences which occur in these two churches, the general scheme being almost identical in each case. At Copford there is little doubt that the paintings have been restored at some time subsequent to their execution, and they have, within the last year or two, been in a great measure repainted, while at Kembley the paintings remain exactly in their original condition.

At Copford again, the various ornamental patterns are, with one or two exceptions, if Norman, of unusual design, while at Kembley the chevron and other ornaments are

1 A complete set of coloured drawings of the paintings in the chancel is about to be published in the *Archaeologia*. 
such as are commonly found among the distinguishing mouldings of the twelfth century.

The whole of the ceiling or vault is occupied as at Copford and in the chapel of St. John in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, with a painting of Our Lord in Glory. Our Lord is represented as seated within an irregular vesica, with His head to the west, and in the act of benediction. The monograms “IHC” and “XPS” are within the vesica, and the difference between the “sigmas” is especially noticeable. Our Lord is surrounded by the emblems of the four evangelists, two on each side, while at His head stand two cherubims with folded wings and with pennons in their hands, and two more cherubims and St. Peter and the Blessed Virgin, with the names SCS. PETRUS and SCA. MARIA, stand at His feet. By His side are the seven candlesticks, and scattered about on the groundwork, which is of a deep red colour, are the sun, moon, earth, and stars. As a border to the east and west ends of the picture are some interlacing chevrons or lozenges in red, yellow, and white, forming a most elegant design. On the north and south walls of the chancel, filling up the whole space between the chancel arch and the windows on the north and south sides respectively, are paintings of the twelve apostles, six on each side, seated on thrones, and in attitudes of profound adoration. As at Copford, where however only ten of the apostles are depicted, St. Peter, in this instance, only holding one key, occupies the most eastern place on the north side, and he is the only apostle who has his distinctive emblem. The apostles are represented as being seated under semi-circular headed canopies painted yellow, the pilasters supporting the arches being pierced with long round headed openings. Within the splays of the windows on the north and south sides of the chancel is a pattern of alternate semicircles of red and white on a black ground, with a semicircular bordering of red and white to the one and of yellow to the other, and above the heads of the windows are painted numerous towers and turrets, doubtless meant to convey an impression of the Heavenly Jerusalem. Between these windows and the east wall are, on the south side beneath a canopy, a female Saint with a curious mural crown and holding a sword, and
supposed to be the Blessed Virgin, and on the north, St. James the Great. The scraping off of the whitewash has not been completed in this north-east corner of the chancel. On each side of the east window, under a canopy, is a large figure of a bishop in mitre and eucharistic vestments holding a pastoral staff, and in the act of benediction. On either side, at his feet were discernible on the north, the chalice, and on the south, the host. The splay of the east window, only partially exposed, contains similar ornaments to those on the north and south sides. Above it within medallions are three angels, seated and holding what appear to be scrolls. Two much larger figures of angels occupy a similar position at Copford. On the east face of the chancel arch, is a sort of ornamented "tau" pattern, similar to the embattled parapets of Flemish houses, the pattern being carried round the outer courses of the arch in successive orders of red, white and yellow. It is the opinion of a very high authority on this subject, that this pattern is one of the ornaments used only in the style of Byzantine architecture. Round the inner course are a series of ten medallions, the subjects of which are entirely obliterated. These may have contained the signs of the Zodiac, which are painted on the soffit of the chancel arch at Copford, and though here there are only ten medallions, it is possible that two signs may have been represented in the same medallion, as is the case in the Norman arches at Shobdon and Brinsop, in the neighbouring county of Hereford.

Such is a brief description of these most interesting paintings. The whitewash still remains undisturbed at the west end of the north and south walls of the nave, in the north-east corner of the chancel, and on one side of the splay of the east window; but in these particular localities it was found that some comparatively recent disturbance had taken place, so that it was deemed useless further to interfere with the surface. There can be no doubt that the whole of the painting in the chancel, and a considerable amount in the nave, date from the Norman period. On close examination, it appeared that the paintings in the chancel, and some of those in the nave, were executed on a very thin coating of dis-temper, probably not exceeding one-sixteenth of an inch.
in thickness. It seems, therefore, highly probable that as the paintings are executed on this very thin coating of distemper, which is directly laid on the rough surface of the wall, the paintings are, as has been previously suggested, coeval with, and formed part of the original design of the building. As to the date of the building of the church, no record exists. Kempley is mentioned as Cheneplei in Domesday Book, and seems to have been situated in the centre of a forest district. It may be worthy of discussion as to how these elaborate paintings came to be executed in a place, which seems always to have been out of the way and of no importance; and one theory suggests that it may have served, as in the case of Greenstead in Essex, as the temporary shrine or resting-place of the body of some saint or important personage.

Judging from the massive character of the chancel arch and the south and west doorways, the date of the church can hardly be later than the year 1130, and to this date, or very shortly afterwards, the execution of the paintings may be assigned. In a gazetteer of Gloucestershire, in which some account of the paintings is given, the probable date of them is said to be 1160; while it is stated that Mr. Gambier Parry considers them as late as 1180.

The paintings at Kempley are, in all probability, by far the most interesting of the Norman period, which are at present known to be in existence in England, and they certainly remain as most valuable examples of the manner in which even the plain and comparatively poor Norman buildings were beautified in order to atone for deficiency in stone or ornamental carving, and they afford an additional proof, if any were required, that the interior of churches, even as far back as the twelfth century, did not present the bare and cheerless appearance that one is accustomed to notice in their present condition.

A list and short account of such other examples of Norman paintings, of which any information has been obtained, though probably only a portion of those actually in existence in England, will perhaps form a fitting conclusion to this subject.

*Deerkurst.* ¹ The earliest existing paintings in England are probably those at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire, which are assigned to a period

¹ *Archaeological Association Journal,* ii, 390.
antecrior to the Norman conquest, though, as we know that this church was consecrated in the year 1056, the early date given to these paintings must be received with some hesitation.

**Canterbury.** The earliest mention of church painting in England is a record by one of the early chroniclers of the splendid paintings in Prior Conrad's Choir at Canterbury Cathedral. It is not improbable that those now remaining in St. Michael's Chapel, on the north side of the north choir aisle, and consisting of parallel bands of colour, zigzags, foliage and other Norman decoration, may belong to this early period. The paintings in St. John's (or more properly St. Gabriel's) Chapel, on the south-east side of the crypt, certainly belong to the Norman period. On the ceiling of the nave are numerous medallions, which are still partially concealed by whitewash. On the ceiling of the diminutive chancel is a representation of Our Lord in Glory, and on the walls the incidents connected with the Birth of Our Lord and St. John the Baptist, the Vision of Ezekiel, and St. John writing the "Book of Revelation," with the Angels of the Seven Churches and the Seven Stars in medallions.

**Durham.** At Durham Cathedral traces of colour remain on the chevron mouldings of the arches of the Galilee, and on the east wall of the same building are two full length figures, supposed to represent Richard I and Bishop Pudsey, and to have formed part of a painting of the crucifixion of the latter part of the twelfth century.

**Peterborough.** At Peterborough Cathedral, on the ceiling of the nave are various figures, supposed to have been painted in the twelfth century. The ceiling was probably put up by Abbot Benedict, who ruled the monastery from 1177 to 1193.

**Ely.** At Ely Cathedral round the arches at the eastern end of the nave, and on the vault of the south aisle, are cable, zigzag, and flower ornaments. In two chapels on the east side of the north transept are some circles and other ornaments, and in the vestry on the west side of the south transept are some scroll and floral patterns partly restored, these are all late twelfth century.

**Norwich.** At Norwich Cathedral are remains of painting on the arches and capitals at the east end of the choir in the choir aisles, on the ceiling of the sacrist's room and of St. Luke's Chapel; also (restored) on the eastern face of the chancel arch, and on the ceiling of the Jesus chapel, date about 1170.

**Worcester.** At Worcester Cathedral round an arch on the east side of the south transept is a roll moulding with an elaborate beaded cable pattern painted on it.

**St. Albans.** At the Abbey church of St. Albans, the tower arches, and the Norman arches and piers of the choir to the west of the tower and the north side of the nave, are ornamented with patterns of roses, cables, chevrons, and squares or oblongs in alternate colours, red and yellow being the most common; the capital of one column at the east end of the north side of the nave is painted so as to represent the early cushion capital, and round the windows in the north transept are painted arches resting on Norman shafts and caps. In the spandril

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1 Murray's *Handbook of Durham*; Scott's *Antiquarian Gleanings*, Pl. vii & viii.
of the arch opening from the south transept to the south choir aisle is
the figure of a seraph with a scroll.

Doncaster.¹ Round the arches of the church of St. Mary Magdalene, Doncaster, now destroyed, were scroll and other patterns of the twelfth century.

Hovingham. At the Norman church of Hovingham, in Yorkshire, were discovered and destroyed numerous layers of paintings, the lowest of which probably dated from the Norman period.

Halesowen and Beaudesert. Round the splay of a Norman window at the churches of Halesowen in Shropshire, and of Beaudesert in Warwickshire, are some masonry ornaments of the twelfth century.

Yaxley.² At Yaxley church in Huntingdonshire, in the north transept is a representation of the Torments of Hell, which has been re-whitewashed, though drawings are in existence.

Leominster. At Leominster priory church, on the south side of the original Norman nave triforium story are remains of elaborate Norman decoration, the chevron and scallop ornaments being most used.

Tewkesbury. At Tewkesbury Abbey church, numerous most interesting paintings, stated to be of the twelfth century, have recently been discovered.

Devizes. At St. John’s church, Devizes, on a Norman arcade, walled up in the chancel, remains of early painting were discovered.

Arington. At Arington church, Berkshire, on the columns of the chancel arch is a lozenge pattern, and on the soffit of the arch an irregular row of stars.

Stanford Dingley. At Stanford Dingley, in Berkshire, are masonry patterns, late twelfth century.

Stewkley. On the soffit of the chancel arch at Stewkley in Buckinghamshire a floral pattern was discovered and destroyed. The design has been copied in the present decoration of the vault of the chancel, the original being probably late twelfth century.

Castle Hedingham.³ At Castle Hedingham church, Essex, on the south wall of the chancel is a painting of a bishop in full pontificals, now whitewashed over.

Hadleigh.⁴ At Hadleigh, Essex, within the splay of a window is a figure with the inscription “Beatus Tomas” below it. This is by some supposed to have been painted between the years 1170 and 1173, the dates of the martyrdom and canonization of Thomas a Becket.

East Ham.⁵ At East Ham, Essex, are some masonry patterns.

Guildford.⁶ At St. Mary’s Church, Guildford, are numerous paintings of the twelfth century, conjectured to be the work of William the Florentine; the subjects represented are, St. Michael weighing souls,

¹ Builder, 1864, p. 688, and a work on the Church, by the Rev. J. E. Jackson.
² Ecclesiologist, iii, 55.
³ Builder, 1864, p. 724.
⁴ Murray’s Handbook of Essex.
⁵ Builder, 1864, p. 688.
the Torments of Hell, Our Lord in majesty, and various others, in medallions, with numerous scroll patterns.

**Pirford.** At Pirford church, Surrey, are paintings assigned to the early part of the twelfth century, viz., on north wall of nave "a scroll with figures above it, and beneath it two angels welcoming a soul to Paradise."

**Brabourne.** At Brabourne, Kent, at the east end of the chancel, some walled up Norman arches with a floral pattern have been recently discovered.

**Ulcome.** At Ulcombe, Kent, on the soffit of an arch are some chevrons, late twelfth century.

**Chichester.** On the east wall of the church of St. Olave, Chichester, are paintings of "The Assumption," "twelve figures in niches, &c.,” assigned to the twelfth century.

**Westmeston.** On the east wall of the nave of Westmeston church, Sussex, were subjects from the Passion, &c., twelfth century, now destroyed.

**Slindon.** At Slindon church, Sussex, are ornamental patterns, partly of the twelfth century.

**Battle.** On the north wall of the nave clerestory at Battle church in Sussex were discovered "a series of paintings of the twelfth century, with outlines of red ochre and flat tints of green, blue, yellow and red representing sacred subjects, with figures of saints and worthies in the window jambs." These are now very faint.

**Winchfield.** On the exterior of the tower of Winchfield church, Hampshire, is a large, though now faint, representation of a Salamander or serpent, probably coeval with the Norman tower.

**Milton Abbys.** At Milton abbey, Dorsetshire, on two panels, are early portraits of Athelstan and his queen, which may possibly date from the Norman period.

**Tintagel.** At Tintagel, in Cornwall, beneath several layers of later paintings, a bold chevron pattern was discovered, which is now again concealed by a coating of yellow wash.

**Brabourne.** In conclusion should be mentioned as an unique specimen of Norman painting in a perfect state, a small window on the north side of the chancel of Brabourne church in Kent, the glass of which remains in perfect condition. This is believed to be the only perfect window remaining in England of the Norman period; and in Normandy there is also but one perfect relic of the glass of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

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1 *Sussex Archaeological Journal.*
2 *Archaeological Journal, xx, 168.*
3 *Sussex Archaeological Journal, xix, 130.*
5 *Ecclesiologist,* xii, 234.