

On the Track of Old Friends in Derbyshire.

Edward Watkins, of Fritchley, Derby, has permitted us to read some notes of his recent investigations into ancient Quakerism in Derbyshire, and we print below a statement of some of the early Meetings for Discipline in that county, with extracts from his notes.

“ White Lee or Whiteley is the original name of the Monthly Meeting for this and the south part of Derbyshire, and the earliest known Monthly Meetings of this district were held there, at the house of a Friend, no doubt. Whiteley is now part of Ripley, ten miles N. of Derby, four E. of Fritchley. The earliest mention of Whitelee as a meeting is 29 vii. 1673, at a Quarterly Meeting at Tupton—‘Receiued then from Friends belonging to the meeting at whitelee [&c. ?] tenne shillings towards the charges of W^m Storrs going to London with John Brocksopp to the general meeting of Friends there.’

“ The first notice of Breach (2½ miles S. of Ripley) in the old Derbyshire Quarterly Meeting, among my notes, is at a Quarterly Meeting at Tupton, 25 i. 1679—‘ Friends of Breach house meeting;’ but the Monthly Meeting was generally or always called Whitelee by the Quarterly Meeting till the end of 1701, when it became regularly Breach Monthly Meeting. But that the Monthly Meetings were held at Breach is evident not only from the above allusion in 1679, but from a marriage certificate or liberation respecting Matthew Smith of Riddings ‘signed at our M^o M^{ts} at Breach house 9 xii. 1687/8.’

“ Waingroves, between Breach and Ripley, was where the Roads family lived, who mostly or all emigrated to America by degrees between 1682 and 1699. The first mention of the father, John Roades, is in the Derbyshire Book of Friends’ Sufferings in 1670. Waingroves was then called Windgreaves and sometimes Waingriff, &c., and is described as of Ripley—other early Friends are described as living in or near Ripley and other adjoining places as Codnor and Loscoe.

“ The earliest Derbyshire records of Quarterly and Monthly Meetings are in 1672—though not improbably

some existed from 1668 or 1669 as in Notts and other counties.

“ The Book of Sufferings takes us back, however, to 1659, and Besse’s account of Derbyshire Friends’ sufferings to 1654, and as to George Fox, John Fretwell, and Elizabeth Hooton, to 1650 and 1651.

“ After the Toleration Act in 1689 either Breach Meeting House was rebuilt or altered. Another memorandum from the Quarterly Meeting book, 8 mo. 1693, says, as to Whitelee Monthly Meeting, ‘ Their meeting house is not yet finished but wants £14. 9. 0 for this. This meeting agrees to a collection throughout the county.’ ”

At Denby, E. Watkins came across traces of the Muggletonians, opponents of early Friends, and ascertained that there were still one or two families in this district of that persuasion, and that “ there might still be some in London.” About forty years ago annual meetings of such were held at Denby, attended by visitors from London.

At Breach Farm, our discoverer struck the remains of the old Meeting House and Burial Ground—remains consisting of “ a large patch of plaster two or three square yards in size on the outside of what is now one of the walls of the farmyard,” also “ two or three mounds in the graveyard and perhaps a stone or two.”

Waingroves was next visited. Waingroves Hall is a double-fronted brick building, and at the back “ there seemed a huge pile of brick and stone of different ages.”

Then came Whiteley. “ At Whiteley in 1677 were the dwelling-places of William Woolley, weaver, Edward Searson (Sarson, Serson), tanner, and John Lynam, wheelwright,” but no ancient building likely to have been a Meeting House was found here.

Living generations thrust aside the mouldering relics of their predecessors for their own convenience, to commemorate their more immediate relatives and friends, or to enhance their own personal importance. But historians do their best to rescue, at least in part, by representation or description, the perishing memorials, and to prove that paper memorials may be more permanent than those of brass and stone.

Quoted in the *History of the Wilmer Family*.