

John Firth of Shepley

“ There is a tradition that one John Firth of the family of the Shepley Lanehead Firths was a cavalry soldier or officer, serving in a troop raised by Bosville of Gunthwaite Hall during the wars of the Commonwealth. This troop was a thousand strong and it was said that every man was six feet in height.

“ This John Firth, in the course of such service, was one of a regiment employed to guard Nottingham Castle at the time when George Fox was there confined. George Fox preached to the soldiers from the Castle walls, and John Firth was convinced thereby, and became a Friend, being the first of the family who adopted that religious belief, which has remained in the family ever since.

“ It is not known whether this John Firth at once resigned his post in the army, but he soon became obnoxious to the Royalists, who sent a body of horse from Halifax to Lanehead to arrest him. He took refuge in an old quarry at Skelmanthorpe, but was discovered and taken prisoner. He was mounted on the back of the horse behind one of the troopers and as they were passing through Boxing Wood, situated between Shelley and Kirkburton, John Firth slipped off behind and escaped into the wood. Search for him proved fruitless and the troop resumed their way without him.

“ The captain of the horse was very much exasperated at the loss of his prisoner, and in passing the vicarage house which then stood, and still stands, on the right-hand side leading through Kirkburton, he emptied his arquebus through the staircase window which faced the road. The vicar's wife was descending the stairs at the time with a light in her hand and, whether intentionally or not, he shot her dead.”

Above is taken from a manuscript account of the Firth family, owned by the late Helen Wood, of Colwyn Bay, and on loan from Mary Alice Chipchase of the same.

The family home was Lanehead, Shepley, near Huddersfield, Yorkshire, where early meetings were held “ in a chamber over the cellar in the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth in the Low Room or Far Parlour,” alternating with meetings at Highflatts and Wooldale. The Lanehead premises were sold away from the family in 1928. The descent of the family to the present day is set out in this book ; the name has survived to modern times in association with Bottomley, Clark, Crosland, Fryer, Lowe, Woodhead.

M. A. Chipchase has presented to D the original document constituting the house of Joseph Firth, “ Hallroyd Lane Head in Shepley,” a meeting place for religious worship, anno 1695 ; also a receipt dated July 7, 1686, for two shillings “ one half years Duty for two fire-hearths ” in the house of Joseph Firth.