

Farnhill Hall

by Harry Speight (aka Johnnie Gray)

(From "Through Airedale from Goole to Malham", 1891)

Farnhill Hall is one of the most ancient dwelling houses in Yorkshire. It stands on a round knoll of rough rock, 480 feet above sea level, and occupies a fine strategic position, commanding extensive and beautiful views of the landscape in every direction. On the north and south the moors rise to a height of 1000 feet. To the west, the fells of Ryeloaf, Malham, Sharper, Flasby, and Crooked Rise are seen in the distance. Looking south there is a capital echo.

Farnhill Hall is a castellated fortified house possessing four towers and was built for defence. Whitaker describes it as a peel or building of refuge for local people during the forays of marauding Scots. The building shows very evident traces of 13th or 14th century work. It has several lancet tricuspid windows, the wide splays on the inside of which give a very good idea of the great thickness of the walls, which vary from four to eight feet. The towers are solid, with parapets to the top to screen a watchman from observation. The symmetry of the earliest building is destroyed by the addition of the wings, though these are themselves of considerable antiquity.

The internal arrangements are, of course, quite different to the original ideas of the builders of the house, and are at present a good example of modern comfort and elegance.

The interior dwelling appears well preserved, and there is a look of solidity and airiness about the rooms, which are large and lofty for a building to conspicuously ancient. On an outbuilding appear the letters and date EE 1560 AE, the initials of Edm. Eltoft and his wife.

In 1590 we find Edward Walmysley, gent., and Robert Walmysley, gent., obtained from Edmond Eltoft, Esq., and Thomas Eltoft, his son and heir, conjointly with four others, "ten messusages with lands at Farnhill, to be held at an annual rent of £20, payable on the 15th day next following the feast of St. Martin the Bishop, and the 15th day next following the feast of Pentecost, in equal portions at the south porch of the parish church or chapel of Cliderowe, in the co. Lancaster". The Eltofts were a very wealthy family, having extensive possessions in Airedale and elsewhere.