

## Farnhill Family

Author unknown

Immediately after the Domesday Survey, the Anglian owners were violently dispossessed of their lands, and of anything else they may have had, and their possessions were divided amongst the Captains who had aided King William in the conquest of England. The Skipton Fee, of which Farnhill was a part, was granted to Robert de Romillie, a descendent of an ancient French family.

The first mesne lords of this manor, under the de Romillies, were the Fernhills or Farnhills. There is a very ancient charter, probably as old as King Stephen (1135-1154) to which Adam de Fernhill was a party. The charter refers to lands in the village, and also to the well near to Farnhill Hall.

More than a century elapses before I again find mention of the Farnhill family. In 1255, Alexander de Farnhyl held half a carucate here, doing foreign service and paying yearly 10s. There would appear to have been another Adam at this time, for a daughter of Adam holds in Farnhill two bovates of land by the same service; these were worth yearly, 5s. Another person, whose name has not been preserved, held one carucate of land in Farnhill and Cononley, paying yearly on St. Oswald's Day, 3/7d. It will be noticed that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Farnhill and Cononley are mentioned together. I cannot say with certainty, but I am of the opinion. that the two villages have been very closely connected for a very lengthy period.

A John de Farnhill, on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1274, was one of the jurors appointed to decide a very important case arising out of a claim made by the Canons of Bolton, asserting their right to elect a Prior during a vacancy without referring the matter to the Lords of Albermarle. The inquisition was held at Skipton, and the jurors were all men of distinction.

The next name we come across is that of Robert de Farnhill. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 1300, and also in 1306, he was one of the witnesses to the deeds included in the Glusburn Charters.

Robert de Farnhill would be living at the Hall during the time the Norman Castle at Skipton was held by the Crown, by the artifice of a priest (probably John de Walkyngton, of Kildwick, says an old account). In 1309, the castle was taken or obtained from its rightful owner, the Earl of Albermarle, and given to Edward II, who bestowed this valuable inheritance on his ruinous favourite Piers de Gaveston. He, together with other noblemen in their loose extravagant perambulations, held a private levee, or royal banquet, in sumptuous splendour, with their ladies-in-waiting, in Fern Hill Castle, now known as Farnhill Hall. Such is the story the old records tell.

The most frequently mentioned name in the connection with the Farnhill family is that of John de Farnhill. He was a man much sought after in relation to the legal affairs of the parish, and even in other districts. He attested many local documents during the years 1320 to 1360. John de Farnhill was evidently a wealthy man, and possessed property in other parts. In the year 1338, he bought at Carleton, near Skipton, 20 acres of land, 10 acres of meadow, and 30 acres of wood. The price he paid for the whole property was 40 marks. In the year 1363, he was one of the jurors who signed the valuation of the property after the death of Isabella, wife of Robert de Clifford, Third Lord of Skipton. There was also another juror whose name was Richard Farnell. This is the only mention of a Richard I have come across.

When the Poll Tax of 1379 was collected, the Farnhills do not appear to have been living at the ancestral home, for another name, that of John Copley, appears as the chief man in the list for the village. A Thomas de Farnhill is mentioned in the Glusburn list of this Poll Tax, and from the amount of tax with which he was assessed, does not seem to have been possessed of more property than his neighbours.

It seems probable that the main line of the Farnhill family dwindled, and gradually became extinct, owing to the heirs embracing what was known as a "religious life". It was customary at this period for the leading families to dedicate one or more of their children to the service of the Church. The Farnhill family would seem to have kept up this tradition.

In the list of Priors who have ruled over that "poem in stone", Bolton Priory, we find two names of members of this ancient local family. A John de Farnhill was the 13<sup>th</sup> Prior, and he resigned his office in 1416. There is yet another John de Farnhill who was installed as Vicar of Skipton in 1415, and also became the 15<sup>th</sup> Prior of Bolton in 1439. This is the last notable representative of the family we have been dealing with, that I have found. The later Farnhills appear to have been equally generous to the Church with their material possessions as with their personal services. At some unknown time, but certainly before 1376, Farnhill Hall, and the Manor of Farnhill (with certain small exceptions) had come into the hands of the Vicars of the Churches of Kildwick and Carleton.

The person name of Farnhill occurs often in the Kildwick Church Registers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A branch of the family appears to have settled at Cowling, and to have given their name to a plot of land in the village: Farnhill Ing Top, though I believe the name has been corrupted, even in this short space of time, to Farling Top, a name with quite a different meaning to the original one. I have a record of a Chancery Court case in connection with the Cowling branch of the family, but it has no reference to Farnhill Hall.

So far as I know, the family name of Farnhill is extinct in Kildwick Parish at the present time.

It would be extremely interesting if the history of the Farnhill family could be fully gone into. I'm afraid that very little could be obtained locally, and that it would be necessary to consult documents in London.

It would be a mistake to suppose, even at the early period we have been dealing with, that all the land in Farnhill belonged to the family at the Manor House. In 1342, Robert de Bradley, of Hamblethorpe, gave to Thomas de Berewyke, and Alice his wife, two messuages, 30 acres of land, 6 acres of meadow, and two acres of wood in Farnhill. The rent of these 38 acres was that they should pay yearly, at the Nativity of S. John the Baptist, one rose.

I often think, when I have been gathering together the brief family records that are left to us, that there is a point which we seldom consider. It is difficult for us to feel that these men of the past were similar men to ourselves. They had each their own mead of joy and sorrow, of success and of failure. And then there was a day ..... when they would look for the last time on the river, the fair green meadows, and the great shadowy woods, and the moors with their splendid scarps of crags, the smoke curling above the thatch of the humble dwellings that nestled about the hall, turn away from it all and die.