

The historical record of the contribution of Widow Heath of Preston to the history of Nonconformity as detailed in the following four histories of Nonconformity:

E (70).

Licence to Thomas Milway to be a Congr. Teacher in the howse of Widow Heath at Preston in Hartfordshire. 2. May 72.

The howse of Widow Heath in Preston Hartfordshire licensed for a Congr. Meeting Place. 2 May

Reference: Turner, Prof. George Lyon (1911) Original records of early nonconformity under persecution and indulgence. London: T. F. Unwin. p. 240

Within a few hundred yards of the gateway to Preston Castle, and in the midst of a thick wood which bordered the Castle meadows, and is known as Wainwood, there was a green space, forming a sort of natural amphitheatre, which has come to be called Bunyan's Dell. It is capable of holding several hundred people, and here while the loneliness of the wood sheltered them from their enemies, and friendly scouts kept watch on every side, Bunyan often preached to the people the word of life. There were those living near who were in earnest sympathy with him. We find from the records that the house of Widow Heath, in Preston, Hertfordshire, was licensed for a Congregational meeting-place on May 2, 1672, and that a licence was granted to Thomas Milway to be congregational teacher there.

Reference: Brown, John (1918) John Bunyan: His life, Times and Works p. 240

Among the preaching licences taken out upon the Declaration of Indulgence in 1672, we find one "for the house of Sarah Adams at Hitchin, in the county of Hertford, 22nd July, 1672."³ Also a "licence to JAMES ROGERS to be a Congregational teacher at the house of Sarah Adams at Hitchin, 29th June, 1672." Also "the house of Widow Heath in Preston [parish of Hitchin], Hartfordshire, licensed for a Congregational meeting-place 2nd May, 1672." "Licence to THOMAS MILWAY to be a Congregational teacher in the house of Widow Heath at Preston, in Hartfordshire, 2nd May, 1672." Milway in 1674 became pastor of the Congregational Church in Bury St. Edmunds, an office which he held till 1693.⁴ He preached a funeral sermon for F. Holcroft.

We have already seen that in the hamlet of Preston, near Minsden Chapel, the widow Heath obtained a licence for her house "to be a Congregational meeting-place" on May 2nd, 1672; and a licence was at the same time granted to Thomas Milway to be a Congregational teacher there. Thus provision was made for the spiritual wants of the inhabitants.

Reference: Urwick, W. (1884) Nonconformity in Herts; being lectures upon the nonconforming worthies of St. Albans, and memorials of Puritanism and Nonconformity in all the parishes of the County of Hertford pp. 640 and 641.