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Dean House, Midgley

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PART I

Dean House, Midgley, stands on the lower side of the road from Midgley to Booth, two or three hundred yards past Oats Royd Mills. This name is also applied to the cluster of cottages close to the old farm house, forming a small hamlet. The old house itself is almost devoid of ornamentation. Over one window facing towards the moor the string coursing has a carved round face at each end, and at the far end is added a fleur-de-lis. In the centre of the course is an almost crumbled inscription; by the look of things it won't be long ere all of it will be worn away. It so happens that many years ago I copied what could be read and it appeared then to have the date 1655, only the last figure being doubtful. One can scarcely read a figure to-day. It is a pity from my point of view that it was not copied long ago. There remains the letter "M," with the last line of the M half corroded. One is tempted to say that the M represents the Midgley family which from recorded time has been domiciled in most of the old places nearby, and is well represented to-day. However, one recalls that when a dated stone has initials it is usual to have those of husband and wife, with the family name represented by a middle initial, so that the M in this case must have been for a personal and not a family name.

The old home, mainly quadrangular, is now in four dwellings, that is, counting the part now used as a dairy. A considerable modern laith reaches towards the main road above; and below Dean House are six cottages, the three lower ones having been built shortly after the property came into Murgatroyd ownership in the later years of last century. The laith and the new cottages have a bearing on this story. The large laith is on the site of a very old farm house, and the lower three cottages were built where stood an old laith. These demolished old buildings give credence to a deed of 1820 which alludes to "formerly two farms, now worked as one."

Although Dean House cannot compare structurally with such Midgley houses as Kershaw House, Oats Royd and Brearley Hall for impressiveness, this building and predecessors on the site, by virtue of families associated with it, either as owners or tenants, has a bearing on local history as important as those just named. It is another piece of evidence in its earlier history that the curved ledge circling from Foster Clough, through the village, and around to Booth and beyond, between the steep decline into the valley and the higher moor edge, has been cultivated from the beginnings of local recorded time. Midgley as a township is mentioned in Domesday Book.

While one cannot of certainty say that the site of Dean House was the original home of the important Dean family of old time, it is reasonable to assume that it was, and there are evidences that it was. It could be argued that its name originated from its position in the dean of Luddenden. Although it stands on an eminence with the Luddenden valley deep below, it is some distance from that part of the long valley which to-day we define as Luddenden Dean—that is, the upper part from Holme House Bridge to Castle Carr. It is in the dean or valley, scarcely a third of the way up the heights reached on the moor above. In the dialect, by the way, it is familiarly known as Den-us, Dean itself has for centuries been written Den, Dene, Deyne and Dayin—this last being the prevailing dialect pronunciation. The Old English name of a valley was Denu or Den.

There are, I have said, evidences that hereabouts was the ancient home of the Dean family. The first of these are contained in the Wakefield Court Rolls which date from 1274. At a tourn (or court) in November, 1284, Malyn de Luddenden and others were fined 6d. each for selling ale contrary to the Assize. At another court, held in Halifax in November, 1296, Malina, daughter of Robert de Luddingdene, paid 6d. for a licence to take two acres of land with buildings from Robert Porter, in Sourby for

12 years, to herself and heirs. In all probability these persons would be known as "Malina of the Dene" and "Robert of the Dene." The Rolls for 1307 have a Robert del Dene who frequently appears in the jury at the tourns.

After these references there are others of 1309 made available in a land survey, "The Extent (or Survey) of the Graveships of Rastrick, Hipperholme and Sowerby," copied by John Lister, with notes of identification by H. F. Kendall (H.A.S. Record Series, Vol. 2). The Hipperholme section includes these: Simon del Dene holds a quarter of an oxgang containing 14 acres and pays yearly 10d. Included in the section known as Soureby Extent, which included Midgley, several Deans are mentioned as follows: Richard del Dene holds three acres of old royd land, and pays yearly 12d. Thus even so far back as 1309 the Dean land included "old royd land," that is, land that had long been cleared from woodland and moor. Then: Simon del Dene elected Greave (sheriff or steward) of Hipperholme, December 6, 1398. At the same court is the entry, Walter de Adderisgate and Simon del Dene farmed Chepden (Shibden) Mill appertaining to Rastrick Mill, for 53s. 4d. There are a few more but as they are away from the vicinity of Dean House I pass them by.