

THERE'S STILL A MIDGLEY AT BOOTH FARM

IT'S unlikely country for farming if you are used to the rolling, flat acres of the Plain of York, the sweeping, regular lands of the West, the great farms of the Midlands and the South.

But farming has been going on for three centuries, four centuries half a thousand years and more up here amid the steep, pleasing prospects of the beginnings of the Calder Valley just beyond Halifax's furthestmost remote corner.

Occasionally in these withdrawn nooks of the valley, away from the main roads and the towns, you find farmlands that have been handed down, broadly in the same family either in its main stream of eldest son to eldest son or a close link of it—handed down generation after generation, lifetime on lifetime, living links spanning history (writes our Agricultural Correspondent). Up at Booth, for instance, Booth, with its hill of one-in-six, with its fields all a-tumble, Booth, just the other side of Luddenden, just the other side of Halifax.

In Tudor days

At Booth there was a Midgley, Samuel Midgley, a farmer, long, long ago. Mr. Samuel Midgley farmed part of Booth in the days of Elizabeth Tudor, who died in 1603.

There might have been a Midgley, farmer, of Booth, even earlier. But there is documentary proof of a farmer here in 1599; a family named Midgley like the name of part of the district.

Today, at Booth, there is still in existence a Booth Farm, a very old farm. And the farmer there, wrestling a living from these lands in the reign of Elizabeth the Second as his forebears used to do on these same lands in the days of Elizabeth the First... yes, Midgley is the name. Arnold Midgley.

It's an intriguing, arresting, somehow very moving thought for any visitor with a sense of history—as it must be, too, of course, for members of the Midgley family when they look around and reflect on the centuries...

Hard work

Not that Mr. Arnold Midgley or his wife have a lot of time for looking around and reflecting. It's an old, old farm. It's a very small farm by the standards of other counties. But—well, there's plenty to do on the smallest farm, particularly when you are interested in hay and milk and dairy cows and beef calves, not to speak of the pigs and the poultry.

Of course it's hard work up at Booth Farm. History won't make a farm tick. And Mr. Arnold Midgley is a milk producer-retailer with a milk round in the district as well as his farm.

Then again—Booth Farm, so unusual in one way, is like many more small Calder Valley and Pennines border farms in another,

Old documents

Booth Farm is rich indeed in its historical mementoes. Mr. Arnold Midgley has a box filled with old documents, deeds and titles and the like (one of them in Latin), pertaining to the ownership of various lands in the district.

Of more recent (comparatively) origin is a bill of sale by auction at the Woodman Inn, in October, 1859, of "valuable land and woody ground and a waterfall near Booth."

Several "closes and pastures" were named, the whole forming "19 days' work and 18 perches"—the assumption here is that a day's work was an arbitrary measure which might have been an acre but more probably was one half of an acre.

in its staffing arrangements. There is the farmer. And the farmer's wife. And—well, that's about it. There are three children, but the eldest, a girl, is only eight.

So Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Midgley find plenty to do on their farm. For in season there is hay to be made as stock for the cattle's winter feed, stock against the worst asperities of the weather (and winters really can be bad hereabouts). There are the pigs. There are the poultry. All the year round there is the milk.

Farmer Arnold Midgley, of Booth Farm, likes hay, lots of it. And while there were farmers who were out of home-produced feed before this last winter's end, that wasn't so up at Booth Farm.

A margin

Despite last summer's long drought, which meant early inroads into feed, there was a margin to carry the stock (mainly Shorthorn crosses with one or two Jerseys and Aberdeen Angus cross calves) safely through, through to the spring's first green and the new growing year.

Full days on the farm leave little time for trips to town. But there is the TV today for the odd spare hour—the wonder of the modern age in a rambling farmhouse that has surely known a thatched roof and great old mullioned windows.

Rare rich history... and the tingle and the tang of modern ways, modern things. There is this odd, appealing mixture up at Booth Farm.

The family is, of course, one of the best known in farming in this part of the Calder Valley and adjoining areas. The Midgleys, of Booth Farm, have relatives also in farming, a brother of Mr. Arnold Midgley at Denholme, a cousin in

the same part of the Calder Valley, just outside Halifax.

Mr. Arnold Midgley is a member of the N.F.U. and of the local agricultural societies with a liking for both the Hebden Bridge and the Halifax Shows.