

DUTTON HALL

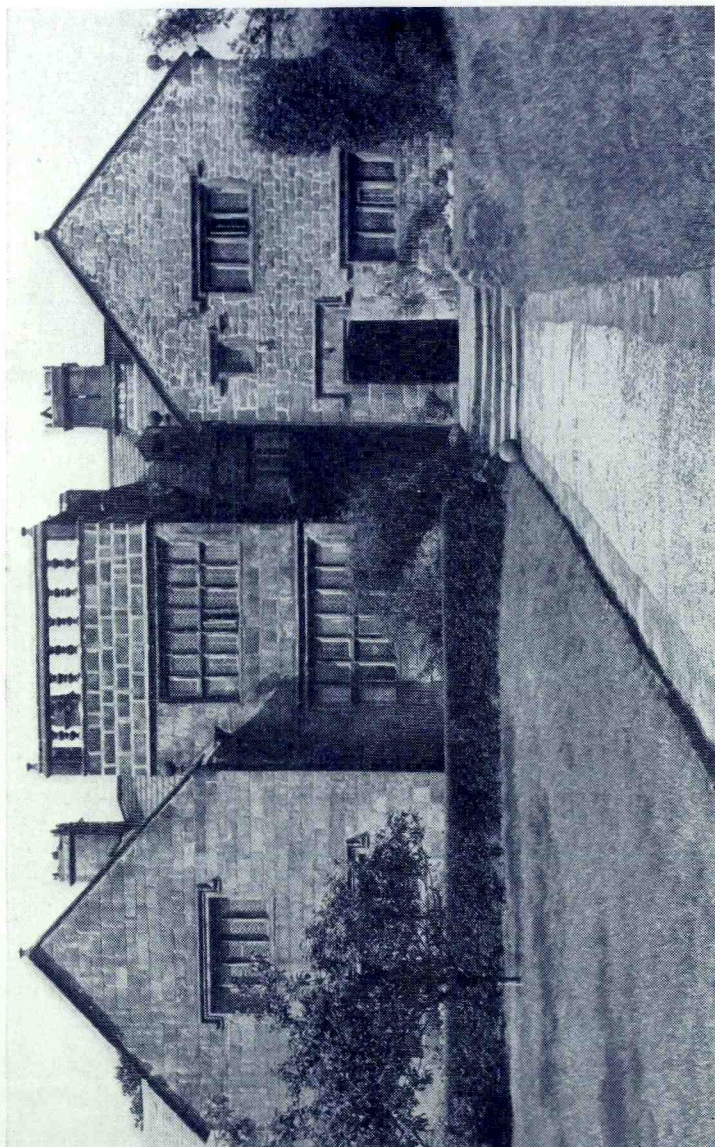
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From about the year 1290, the lordship of the manor of Dutton was held in turn by a family using the local surname, by a younger branch of the Claytons, and by the Belfields of Clegg. From the last named it passed in descent to the Butterworths of Belfield. The hall is finely situated on the southern slope of Longridge Fell, rising here to 1,100 feet, and has a magnificent view to the south over the Ribble Valley. A road from Ribchester passes Dutton Hall to join the road from Longridge to Mitton, after which it continues north through Huntingdon.

The present hall was described by Baines as "a spacious mansion of the age of Charles II". Farrer and others stated that it was erected about 1670-80. The builder was Alexander Butterworth, D.L., J.P., of Belfield, who inherited the Dutton estate as a minor upon the death of his uncle, Edward Butterworth, M.P., J.P., in 1653. Alexander was high sheriff of the county of Lancaster in 1675 and 1676. Dutton Hall, apart from its delightful setting, was very conveniently situated midway between his main residence at Belfield Hall near Rochdale, and Lancaster where his official duties had to be carried out, being within easy riding distance of both. It was therefore natural for him to increase his own comfort by rebuilding his ancestral manor-house here. Such was the affection which Alexander Butterworth had for Dutton that even in his latter years he kept a housekeeper in residence. His domestic steward, named Townley, also came from this district. In a list of his possessions in 1707 lands in Belfield, Butterworth, Castleton, Huddersfield, Manchester, Ribchester and elsewhere are mentioned. Separate details are given of the houses intended for his own occupation, including: "a messuage called Dutton Hall, in Ribchester, co. Lanc., and five acres of land, meadow and pasture to the same belonging".⁽¹⁾ His housekeeper at this time was Mrs. Jennetta Dewhurst. Periodical visits would, of course, be necessary in connection with the administration of his other landed property in the neighbourhood.

Because of the sound and robust construction by Alexander Butterworth, and the care which the fabric has received in the intervening period, Dutton Hall today is in excellent order. The present owner, Robert Platt, Esqr., takes the utmost pride in it, and maintains its historic features in an admirable way.

⁽¹⁾ *Harl. MSS.* No. 7, 347 24 June, 1707.



Photograph by Ralph Cross

Plate 11. DUTTON HALL

The hall has undergone very little change, and the work of nearly three centuries ago is still remarkably fresh and good.

The clear description of the house given by Farrer remains very accurate. He speaks of Dutton Hall as a picturesque two-storey building, with balled gables and mullioned windows. The main front, facing south, is 63 feet in length, consisting of a recessed middle part containing the hall, with two gabled end wings. The plan is a later adaptation of the general type in use in the preceding century. The main entrance has been placed in the east wing, leaving room for the principal feature of the front elevation. This is the fine square bay window of the great hall, a charming and impressive architectural conception that occupies nearly the whole of the space between the wings in the west angle. Externally the bay is 14 feet wide with a projection of 6 feet, and goes up both stories. It terminates in a kind of tower with a balustraded parapet, giving decided character and distinction to the design. It has a large mullioned and transomed window of seven lights placed at the angle, with three lights on the return: the rest of the windows of the house being low and without transomes, a good effect is produced by the contrast.

The strength of the structure is derived largely from the large gritstone blocks of which the walling is generally composed. An exception is the east wing, which is faced with rough coursed sandstone pieces, with gritstone quoins: this may be a rebuilding. The windows of the west wing retain their original leaded lights, which are set in good geometrical patterns. Other features of the exterior include a wooden bell-turret,⁽²⁾ placed in the recess between the great bay window and the east wing; and an open porch with a four-centred arch, having a stone seat on one side.

The interior has many features of interest. The great hall is flagged diagonally and has a handsome stone fireplace with a wide chimney through which the sky is visible from below. A curious feature of the stone screen forming the inglenook is that it is provided with a peep-hole. This noble apartment has panelling of the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Three steps down from the hall is another beautiful room, the parlour or withdrawing-room. This has ancient wainscoting, and is lit by some fine transomed windows.

Lighted by the upper part of the bay, and approached by a wide and well-proportioned stairway, is the court room.

⁽²⁾ At Ashton New Hall, Cheshire, where the author lives, a similar bell is said to have been the earliest fire-alarm in the district, while another at the neighbouring Carrington Hall was for summoning farm-workers from the fields at dinner-time.

Above the fireplace there is an elegant plaster panel, showing conventional floral ornament within a moulded border. Although traditionally known as *Cromwell's Court Room* and also as *Judge Walmesley's Room*, this chamber appears only to date from the Restoration, like the rest of the fabric, and not to incorporate any part of the earlier building. The name court room may very well have indicated that it was here that Alexander Butterworth exercised his functions as a justice of the peace. In his day the administrative and judicial duties of those appointed to the commission of the peace were very wide, and they transacted the chief county business. At that time the qualification of justices by estate was still the rule.

The lay-out of the garden on the south side has been effective. It is enclosed on either side by outbuildings giving something of the appearance of a forecourt. The approach is guarded by two tall stone gate piers, surmounted by curiously carved lions.

Something of the English genius is evident in these manor houses, which have been a feature of our countryside since Tudor times. As homes soundly constructed for use and convenience, they have long outlived more ambitious structures built in the height of one or another ephemeral fashion. There is nothing about them of the florid ostentation of many of the châteaux of the Loire. They are a natural part of the local scene, and blend perfectly into the landscape. In character they represent much that is good and wholesome in our traditional way of life.