

This is a Story from 'A Few Forgotten Women'



Dinah Townend

Finding Dinah

Please note that this story contains an account of an assault.

When I started researching the Townend branch of my family I was unaware that they originated from the Huddersfield area and I had never heard of my 4x Great Grandmother Dinah Townend, through my research I now feel that I know her and have a little insight into the life she led.

My maternal Great Grandmother was Jane Townend, born in 1881. Jane became the keeper of the family bible and it is through the family names written inside that I know that her father was Sam Townend born 23rd December 1840. Names are written in ink, with birth dates added alongside in pencil.

With this helpful start I was able to find Sam Townend not only on censuses living with his wife and family but also as a baby under a year old. In the 1841 census baby Sam is living with mother Jane and grandmother Dinah (both recorded as unmarried) and his older brother Henry.

Dinah the family woman

Dinah had three children; firstly, William who was baptised in Emley in 1807 and simply described as son of Dinah Townend, William was a fancy weaver and remained unmarried throughout his life. Then came second child Jane baptised on February 22nd 1818 in High Hoyland, this time the word illegitimate is used.

It took longer to discover Dinah's third child. Looking for records for son William, I found him lodging with a Mary Shaw in 1871 marriage records show that Mary was probably illegitimate and a Townend prior to marriage. Indeed, there is a baptismal record for Mary, mother Dinah Townend in 1826 (although according to all the censuses Mary was born in 1822 which seems more likely given Dinah's age) and makes it likely that Mary shared the same father as Jane and simply got baptised when she was four. I think William may have a different father to Jane and Mary, but it's most unlikely I will ever know the truth.

A baptism record for Dinah shows that she was one of the many children of Titus Townend and Mary Ambler. She was baptized at High Hoyland on 15th November 1786 daughter of Titus and Mary Town(s)end, Titus's occupation is weaver.

Normally this would be about all I would hope to find about an ancestor from that era, but with Dinah that is not the case, I have made two discoveries that give some insight into her life as well as details about her appearance and has led me to speculate on her character and personality.

Dinah the criminal

When the West Yorkshire Archives first went online, I looked at the Townend entries and found a record for a Dina Townend residing in the West Riding House of Correction for “not performing her contract”. This Dina was sentenced for one month and the record shows that her conduct in prison was good. I was delighted to see her description, 5ft 5 (tall for then), grey eyes, brown hair and fresh complexion. I am sure that this is my ancestor Dinah as there are no other Dina or Dinah Townends or Townsends (seem interchangeable) living in the area at that time. Her release date was March 1st 1805. The age is slightly out as going by her baptism she would be 19 by this stage, but maybe she didn't know her own age or simply lied for some reason. But why was Dinah in prison? What does “not performing her contract” mean?

Dinah the victim

A little more insight into what may have happened was another document relating to Dinah (this time spelt Diana). This document is from the Yorkshire Quarter Session Records held in 1802 in Wakefield. A Joseph Haigh has an indictment served on him for assaulting and generally mistreating Dinah who was apprenticed to him aged about 14.

The document doesn't make easy reading and it is horrific to read what Dinah went through, here are some extracts to give you an idea of her ordeal.

“...did wound beat and severely treat so that her life was greatly despaired of and that he the said Joseph Haigh with his hands and fists the said Diana Townend in and upon the Head, Breast, back, face and other parts of the body of the said Diana Townend...”

“...Diana Townend then and there was grievously hurt, bruised and wounded and became and was very sick disordered and ill and continued

so sick disordered and ill from the day and year last aforesaid until the day of the taking of this inquisition..."

"...Joseph Haigh did ... neglect omit and refuse to find provide and allow unto the said Diana Townend so during all the time aforesaid ... sufficient wholesome meat drink washing lodging apparel and other necessarys meet for such an apprentice..."

"...The said Diana Townend has become greatly Emaciated and Wasted in her body and prejudiced in her health and other wrongs to the said Diana Townend..."

The witnesses to these grisly events are John Sunderland, Mary Townend and Edward Jepson. Mary may be Dinah's younger sister, possibly another apprentice to Joseph Haigh.

A note at the end of the document records

"Pont sessions Subs fined 6d and discharged"

I take this to mean that Joseph Haigh was subsequently fined six pence and discharged.

Looking through the assizes there are many similar cases with the employer charged 6d, however most of the cases are neglect rather than the additional violence Dinah suffered.

Dinah the strong woman

The more I find out about Dinah the more questions I have:

Was the prison sentence some sort of revenge on the part of Joseph Haigh?

Why was Joseph Haigh so cruel to her? Was she really poor at her work as the subsequent prison sentence would imply? Or did Joseph Haigh have some grudge against her? Perhaps she rejected his advances and this was his revenge.

Dinah seems to have continued to work until at least the age of 76, as the 1861 census lists her occupation as still a bobbin winder, (although she is also recorded as a widow which clearly isn't true). Surely if her work was so poor, she would have been "let go" by this stage in her life?

The census records imply that Dinah remained close to her family as she is living with one or more family members in each of the three decades recorded, Dinah went through some hard times but kept on going when other mothers may have given up and abandoned their children.

Daughter Jane eventually married a George Senior and had several more children, half siblings to Henry and Sam. It is George Senior who is witness on Dinah's death certificate when she died from old age, aged 82 years and still recorded as a bobbin winder. Perhaps the earlier mentioned fresh complexion was a sign of good health, she certainly had a strong constitution.

One in the eye for you Joseph Haigh!

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