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An Introduction to the East Rounton Estate

fig 1 Rounton Grange, 1872-6, by Philip Webb

A quarter of a century ago, when I first explored the county of North Yorkshire, I was intrigued and also dismayed by two or three sentences in Nikolaus Pevsner's 1966 Buildings of England volume on *Yorkshire: The North Riding.*[1] Under the parish of East Rounton he describes first the church, where he omits the surviving medieval work but mentions the memorial windows which commemorate Gertrude Bell 'the intrepid explorer-archaeologist, the founder Sir Lowthian Bell and his wife, clients of Philip Webb', and then proceeds to describe the great house in the following words: 'Rounton Grange, by Philip Webb, 1872-76, one of his largest and most idiosyncratic works has recently been demolished. It is a great pity, as Webb's works are few, and every one contained statements worth listening to' (*fig1*). He mentions the village school as having been designed by Webb, and then refers to work including the village hall designed by George Jack, who was Webb's last assistant and one of his devoted disciples. All this would be exciting enough, but of course there is much more to it than those brief references suggest.

The parish and village of East Rounton, together with the sister settlement of West Rounton, lie a few miles to the north of Northallerton, the county town, and just to the west of the A19 trunk road which sweeps up from Selby, through York, on past the Rountons towards Middlesborough (where Webb designed both the Clarence Works and the Bell Brothers offices for Sir Lowthian, and his son and successor Hugh), past close to their previous home of Washington Hall, and so to Newcastle, from which Sir Lowthian came and of which he was Mayor in 1854-55 and again in 1862-63. In other words, the A19 connects fairly precisely the several worlds of Isaac Lowthian Bell, first baronet, who was a scientist of considerable ability, a highly successful businessman in the manufacture and marketing of iron and later steel, and moreover a man of taste. He had a base in London, and he moved in artistically aware circles, and he made a friendship with Philip Webb fairly early on. In fact Webb twice added to and extended his first country house in County Durham which, as I have mentioned, was called Washington Hall and is a large mid-nineteenth century house standing only a short distance from Washington Old Hall, which is open to the public as a property of the National Trust and much venerated for its connexion with the family of George Washington.

Round about 1870, he seems to have decided, as many successful Victorian industrialists did[2], to purchase a substantial estate and, in modern parlance, to put down roots and to found a suitable country seat for a dynasty of Bells which was no doubt seen as stretching out to infinity. Happily, they may do just that; as the Bell family still owns the Estate, though they live just across the A19 in the delectable and handsome Arncliffe Hall, a solid house of 1753-54, designed by John Carr of York but containing what Pevsner calls 'some of the most spectacular Rococo plasterwork in the country.' Arncliffe Hall is the focus of the whole Estate to the extent that it has survived to the late twentieth century, and that includes the village of Ingleby Arncliffe which contains significant Arts & Crafts buildings of its own, including cottages by George Jack, an impressive water tower by Walter Brierley, and a village hall by Ambrose Poynter. In other words we have here, in spite of the demolition of Rounton Grange, one of the most remarkable ensembles of Arts & Crafts buildings to be found within a small compass anywhere; and they were the inspiration of two successive squires, Sir Lowthian and his son Hugh, and mostly of

two successive architects, Philip Webb and George Jack, though with notable contributions also in the later phases by Ambrose Poynter and Walter Brierley. As if that were not enough, Sir Lothian had also bought before the end of his life (in 1899) the property which included the medieval and mostly ruinous Mount Grace Priory where, using Ambrose Poynter as his architect on the advice of Philip Webb (who was by then planning to retire), he carried out a restoration inspired by SPAB principles which is, even today, exceptional in that it included both the re-remodelling of lodgings which had been formed into a manor house in the mid-seventeenth century and also the transformation from its ruined to a completed state of a monk's cell so that the visitor, of whom today there are many, can imagine fairly accurately what was the nature of the solitary life of the Carthusian, devoted to prayer and study, to activities such as gardening and weaving, and to living a life which might be described as being that of a 'hermit within a community.'

fig 2 The Rest House which provided for the refreshment and recuperation of urban employees of the Bell family

All this forms part of a wider study, on which I have embarked, to show how a rural estate was formed almost from new at a certain period in history and how, through the highest aspirations of social responsibility as well as for family, the landowner planned and organized on lines both scientific and aesthetic. In the case of Rounton, it would fulfil the normal objectives of a country estate, with a house solid and substantial and built to last, together with extensive gardens both productive and ornamental, and a wider landscape which included trees and greensward and a lake, and beyond that the still wider agro-cultural landscape in which the productivity of the land and the cycle of the seasons were celebrated and enacted by a community of villagers who were, just as much as the urban employees of Bell Brothers in not too far distant Middlesborough, effectively part of the extended family of the patriarchal founder and his immediate relatives. In fact this link was symbolized and, one could say, made manifest by the provision of a cottage (*fig 2*) which was provided for the employees of Bell Brothers to come and stay in for a few days or longer, when sickness or exhaustion prompted the need for a holiday, by the standards of the time an exceedingly enlightened act. In addition, the church was restored and adorned, the village was provided with a school, employment was provided not only around house, stables and gardens but also by the provision of a model farm steading and cottages for the farm-workers, and later on under Sir Hugh various improvements were made including the building of The Square, a superb building which combines retirement houses and the village hall. The poet Glen Cavaliero, paying homage to a similarly enlightened squire in Norfolk, has described all this as 'the tithe that affluence pays to want,' which sums up pretty well the manner in which the Bell family provided for themselves but were at the same time clear that they wanted to provide for the community which they had called into being, both as industrialists and as country squires, whatever was needful for a healthy and dignified existence for their dependents.

What is also of great interest is the relationships which were formed with local families, most notably the Howards of Castle Howard - also in North Yorkshire - who were friends as well as in-laws (a brother of Rosalind Howard, Lyulph Stanley, married Mary Bell) and fellow patrons of Philip Webb, and the 'cousinage' which developed through the further marriages of the younger generations into such families as the Stanleys of Alderley, the Trevelyans of Wallington, the Richmonds (who were and are close to the heart of the artistic establishment at the more open-minded end of the spectrum), the Plowdens and others. Also of special interest is the fact that the daughter of Sir Hugh by his first marriage, Gertrude Bell, achieved an international fame through her skills as an Arabist, as archaeologist, as museologist, and who through her political adroitness played a critical role in the establishment of the kingdom of Iraq, together with the investigation and safeguarding of its built heritage and artistic treasures.

All this is ample material for the book which is in train, but I want to give a clear idea of what is still there today, based chiefly around the personalities of Sir

Lowthian Bell and his architect Philip Webb, and around Sir Hugh Bell - a lesser figure, but nevertheless significant - and his architect George Jack. I want to give some idea of what has survived, and to tease out something of its cultural significance.

The architect Philip Speakman Webb was born in 1831, brought up as a boy and young man in Oxford, apprenticed to a capable architect in Reading called John Billing, later came back to Oxford to be the right-hand man of George Edmund Street, one of the leading architects of the Gothic Revival, met William Morris who came to study with Street to be an architect, moved up to London with Street in 1856, had enough confidence to set upon his own as an architect in London on being commissioned to design a house for William and Jane Morris - namely Red House, Upton, Bexleyheath, one of the most influential smaller country houses of the mid-nineteenth century - and in short was by the late 1860s and early 1870s at the height of his creative powers.

fig 3 The coped grave marker designed by Philip Webb for Mary Bell, d. 1871, in West Rounton churchyard

Much time and energy was to be spent in that crucial decade of the 1870s working for two enlightened Yorkshire patrons: George Howard of Naworth Castle and Castle Howard, who was himself a painter and man of taste, and for whom Webb designed a London house alongside Kensington Palace, 1 Palace Green; and Lowthian Bell. Bell was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne on 15 February 1816 (which makes him a close contemporary of the architect William Butterfield, whose work was greatly admired by Philip Webb), son of Thomas Bell and Catherine Lowthian. Although christened 'Isaac Lowthian Bell' he was known for most of his life by his mother's maiden name of 'Lowthian,' to the extent that it even appears on his gravestone in East Rounton churchyard. His inventiveness and his business acumen caused him to become a wealthy man with interests not only in the manufacture of iron and later steel, but also in the connected undertakings of mining and railway construction. Of his many publications two became classics in their field and one, Chemical Phenomena of Iron Smelting of 1872, was translated into French, German and Swedish while the other, The Principles of the Manufacture of Iron and Steel of 1884, was awarded the Howard Prize of the Institution of Civil Engineers. He was an MP from 1875 until 1880, and was made a baronet in 1885 on the recommendation of Gladstone. He had retained Washington Hall and an affection for it and, in 1886 when his wife Margaret died, he established it as a home for waifs and strays under the name of 'Dame Margaret's Home.' Margaret was the daughter of Hugh Lee Pattinson, a well-known chemical manufacturer, and seems fully to have shared her husband's enthusiasms.

Philip Webb had already designed a coped grave-marker for her daughter-in-law Mary, who had died in 1871 and was buried in West Rounton churchyard; her stone (*fig 3*) is a fine example of taste influenced by the Ecclesiological Society, and in particular by the designs by William Butterfield in *Instrumenta Ecclesiastica*.
But for Margaret Bell he produced one his finest designs for a memorial, and the annotations on the drawings (which still survive, and are dated February 1887) request that it should be done 'in the same kind of stone as the other monuments to the family put in Rounton Churchyard,' that 'Care should be taken in choosing the stone, so that it should not fly or scale with the exposure to weather', that the carver should 'be particular in carving the panel of fire on the base of the shield to get as much character into the carving as possible, and in low relief,' that 'It is understood that all the work shewn on the drawing cannot be cut in the stone, but the tinting of the flames, if attended to, will enable the carver to give life and vigour to his work,' and 'this carving should be done with intelligence ... Care should be taken not to make the carving look too rigid. Sharp chizzels to be used, not rubbing.' All these instructions seem characteristic of a man who had a passionate concern for good craftsmanship, and who was able to sit down and talk to craftsmen in a way which commanded their confidence.

Webb's work of adding on to and partially remodelling Washington Hall had been done in two phases, it seems, 1864 and 1867. The work at Rounton Grange

fig 4 Rounton Grange, East Rounton, North Yorkshire, one of the finest works of Philip Webb - demolished

fig 5 Mount Grace Priory, showing the local vernacular detail of a pantiled roof which has an edging of stone tiles close to the eaves - Webb always made a close study of local buildings before designing a new house

fig 6 The dining room, Rounton Grange

(*fig 4*) was similarly spread out in time, being designed and built from 1872 to 1876. W. R. Lethaby describes the house as 'compact and high, a scheme which was determined on in part to save some especially fine trees and doubtless for sake of the view of the Cleveland hills.' Webb was in the habit of making a really careful perambulation of the site when asked to design a house, and he would often then have a preliminary idea as he responded to the site, which would become the germ of the final design. So in this case Lethaby tells of a 'jotting' which showed 'a square block with tower-like masses at the angles, which must have been the first thought of the scheme and was probably done in the train on the way back from the preliminary survey. The walls are stone, the roofs are covered with pantiles, laid at a steep slope, meeting a wide and tiled band of stone slating next the eaves and thus producing by the nature of the materials, a pleasant bend in the line.' This combination of pantiles with one or more bands of stone flags is found throughout the north-east region on farms and manor houses, and indeed has survived at nearby Mount Grace Priory (*fig 5*), which may well have given Webb the idea. But we know also that, in addition to surveying and studying the site proposed for a house, he was also given to making a careful study of the vernacular buildings of the neighbourhood so that whatever he designed would fit into its local context. The design for Rounton Grange not only exhibits overall the tower-like concept of which Webb was particularly fond, but may also reflect symbolically the strong fortified tower house which is also to be found in the north-east of England. An important subsidiary part of the design is the clock-tower, and the tower motif also appears as the central feature - in effect an enormous lantern - of the conservatory, which was one of the specially memorable aspects of Rounton.

A key aspect of Webb's work as a designer of houses is that he was one of the revivers of the use of polychromy in interiors, and this can be seen at Red House Bexleyheath, in the room he designed in the Victoria & Albert Museum (which really ought to be called the 'Webb Room,' and not - as it is - the 'Morris Room'), and elsewhere; it is exemplified by his use of painted furniture, painted decoration, stained glass, ceramic tiles, and textiles. From this point of view the demolition of Rounton Grange is especially to be regretted. We still have the carpet he designed for Rounton, as we still have the carpet he designed for Red Barns, the house at Redcar which he designed for Lowthian Bell's son and heir, Hugh. But the dining room at Rounton was an ensemble of the highest importance (*fig 6*). It contained one of the ceilings painted by William Morris, it incorporated one of Webb's heroic fireplaces with a wide sweeping stone arch and vigorous mouldings and a hearth breaking forward and supporting a framed inscription which in its powerful but idiosyncratic use of classical language seems almost to presage the work of Plecnik some forty years later, it included painted wooden wainscotting and a built-in dresser for the storage of cutlery and the display of beautiful and exotic ceramics, and - above all - it included as a frieze a set of embroideries designed by Burne-Jones and Morris, and made painstakingly by Margaret Bell and her daughter Florence Johnson, completed in 1880. Lethaby writes of it still in the present tense: 'On one side over the great wide chimney-piece are the Vices in panels: Hate, Felony, &c. On the opposite side is a procession of the Virtues. At one end is the beautiful design - Love leading the Pilgrim.' And Lethaby stresses that 'It was another point in Webb's architectural thought that every greater house was to have some special high interest in the rooms.'[4]

It is to Lethaby that we owe the printing of a celebrated story about Morris. Apparently, while the firm of Morris & Co. was heavily implicated in the supply of furnishings, wallpapers, curtains and so forth for Rounton, Morris 'attended to the decorative painting' himself. 'Sir Lowthian Bell told Mr Alfred Powell that one day he heard Morris talking and walking about in an excited way, and went to inquire if anything was wrong. 'He turned on me like a mad animal - "It is only that I spend my life in ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich." Mr Powell adds, of the house: 'I remember it standing up over the trees with four great chimneys and a

fig 7 Red Barns, Redcar, North Yorkshire, the house built for Hugh Bell by Philip Webb, still surviving and in use as an hotel

fig 8 The Old School, East Rounton, North Yorkshire, the village school designed by Philip Webb, now turned into a private house

fig 9 East Rounton, North Yorkshire, the Home Farm of the Rounton Estate, designed by Philip Webb

fig. 10 East Rounton, the Coach House, designed by Philip Webb incorporating some Late Georgian vernacular farm buildings

wonderful smile about its front to the garden. It had the unobtrusive rightness of Webb's common sense, "one only ware", as he once said when I asked help of him.'

I have already mentioned that Webb designed the headquarters for the firm of Bell Brothers in Middlesborough, still happily intact and well cared for though in another use, as a hostel; and also the Clarence Works, at Port Clarence near Middlesborough, unfortunately demolished; and that he designed a house called Red Barns, in fact in several stages, for Hugh Bell in Redcar (*fig 7*). He also designed a house called Smeaton Manor, at Great Smeaton not far from the Rounton Estate, for Major Godman, who was married to one of Sir Lothian's daughters, Ada. This house still survives, though it has been somewhat badly altered both inside and out; but the stable courtyard is intact and, like all Webb's stable buildings, designed with affection and understanding of the needs of horses.

Much else, however, continues to exist at Rounton. One of those buildings is the former School, now converted into a house (*fig 8*). And another structure is or may be the lychgate leading into the churchyard, which reads like an act of homage to William Butterfield, the architect whose work Webb most admired of living architects. It combines elements of the vernacular, such as the half-hips of the tiny roof structure, and its design vocabulary embraces both Classical and Gothic, which is entirely characteristic of Webb. For some reason Lowthian Bell did not engage Webb to restore the church, which was very competently done by R. J. Johnson in 1884, at a time when Webb was very preoccupied by Clouds as well as being a key figure in the hectic first decade or so of existence of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, of which he had been with Morris one of the founders. Of particular interest is the farm steading (*fig 9*), one of at last three designed by Webb to have survived and in use; together with a marvellous row of cottages for the farm-workers, including a slightly grander one for the farm manager. The cottages have recently been re-pointed, part of the general revival of the Estate under the present owners, John and Venetia Bell; while the steading still requires some careful conservation and repair work. Not the least interesting aspect of Webb's work at Rounton is that he was happy to utilize some existing farm buildings on the site, to remodel them, and to incorporate them. This was the case with the diminutive West Lodge (which is what in Scotland is called an 'inkpot house,' with the flues gathered up into a single central chimney, the whole shape somewhat resembling an inkpot); and with the Coach House, now listed grade II* and on English Heritage's *Buildings at Risk Register*, where once again there is now a scheme for the repair of the structure. This building (*fig 10*) consists of at least one earlier wing, and is fronted by a fine entrance arch with a flat above it for the coachman, vintage Webb design; and the central yard was completely glazed over, for the safe washing down and polishing and security of the carriages. Across the yard from it to the west is the Fowl House, so like a vernacular building that it is scarcely indistinguishable from one, but Webb's drawing for it survives and makes it clear that this is largely a new structure. It now adjoins the later Motor House.

Sir Lowthian Bell died on 20 December 1904, and was succeeded as baronet and as owner of the Estate by Hugh. Hugh had in the meantime married as his second wife Florence Eveleen Eleanore, daughter of Sir Joseph Olliffe, distinguished in her own way, and the author of *At the Works, a Study of a Manufacturing Town* published in 1907 (and dedicated to the social reformer Charles Booth) as well as of novels, plays, and *The Heart of Yorkshire, a Pageant Play produced to support the York Minster Window* Fund in July 1921. It must have appeared to them both that much still needed doing and, thanks to their meticulous habit of recording their work by incorporating small plaques on the buildings for which they were responsible, it is possible to trace a flurry of activity on both sides of the A19. At East Rounton they added a cottage for the head gardener, the East Lodge to provide a grander approach to the main residence coming from the main road, a Motor House - for this Edwardian high noon of country house life was just at that

moment when grandees were exchanging their carriages for the horse-less carriage of the motor car - a major development close to the church called The Square in which six cottages flanked a fine community hall, forming three sides of a square. Appropriately, the west side of The Square forms a backdrop to the view seen from the family burying ground in the churchyard. Indeed there are so many nuances here that demand further exploration. Can it be that the Bells, with their finely developed social consciousness, were influenced by the Garden City Movement and that, on however modest a scale, they wanted to do something which would improve the environment and the housing of their villagers? It is also of interest that their burying ground, while decently screened by hedges on three sides, is not so removed from the villagers as was frequently the case elsewhere and indeed is open towards the rest of the churchyard. Posture in death is as indicative of attitude as in life, and there was no standoffish-ness here.

In West Rounton at this time the most prominent new building was the Methodist Chapel of 1907, distinctly Voyseyesque in its battered walls, its roughcast (still in perfect condition), and in its fenestration. The side windows not only recall Voysey, however, but also the rear facade of the Bell Brothers offices in Zetland Road, Middlesborough. Can it have been designed by George Jack? It seems at least probably, and presumably the Bell family also gave the site or made it available.

Across the other side of the main road lie the scarcely undifferentiated hamlets of Ingleby Arncliffe and Ingleby Cross. At Ingleby Cross are four very remarkable buildings. One is a great puzzle. It is most likely a vernacular building, a stable, with half-hips at either end of its roof; but it looks so much like a vernacular building pretending to be a building by Philip Webb, or a vernacular building altered by Philip Webb, that it is tempting to suppose that he might one way or another have had a hand in it. It is currently the subject of an application for planning permission to turn it into a house, an eminently reasonable thing to do; but it is to be hoped that, as is the case with the Methodist Chapel in West Rounton, it can be done with such a light touch that one will hardly be aware of the changes. Next to it is the village hall, and the house adjoining it presumably for the manager or keeper of the hall, and this forms an altogether delightful group of buildings, of stone, brick, and pantiles (*fig 11*). The hall itself has flat pilasters on its main front to the street, half-hips again at either end of the roof, and over it all rises an elegant wooden cupola with a copper-covered ogival cap. Above that again, more decorative ironwork in the form of a weather vane. Over the doorway of the house, centrally placed, is a pediment with the carved legend below: 'For HB and FJ 1910.' Hugh and Florence must have been pleased with their handiwork. This is all by Ambrose Poynter, the architect for the repair, conservation and reconstruction work at Mount Grace Priory, recommended to Sir Lowthian by Philip Webb. But the hall has quite a lot in common with The Square of 1906, at East Rounton, which is the work of Webb's last and devoted assistant and to some extent his successor, George Jack. What, at any rate, made the younger Bells switch their architectural loyalties? Or perhaps it was simply that they liked to work with all of them, and to give them different opportunities?

fig 11 Ingleby Cross, North Yorkshire, the village hall designed by Ambrose Poynter, one of series of public-spirited developments by Sir Hugh and Lady Bell

At Ingleby Cross there is one more fine structure to be mentioned, and that is the Blue Bell Inn, which was designed by Walter Brierley, best of all Yorkshire architects of the Arts & Crafts period and greatly appreciated by the land-owning classes as well as by the Church in the shape of the diocese of York. The inn-sign, of decorative wrought ironwork confirms the date and patronage: 'HB AD 1912.' This is almost like a parody of Webb in his vernacular manor house or farm-house manner. Pantiled roofs, stone-built, arrow-head tooling, keystones over some of the windows and not over others, some windows squeezed under the widely projecting eaves in a manner recalling Webb's Red House, squat chimneys (not a very Webb-ish feature, it is true); extensive outbuildings. Deeper questions arise. Having provided or encouraged a Methodist Chapel in one village in 1907, how was it that they were providing the village inn at another settlement on the Estate in 1912?

fig 12 Ingleby Arnecliffe, the Water Tower, by Walter Brierley, the most distinguished of the Yorkshire-based Arts and Crafts architects and, as revealed by all his most characteristic works, a disciple of Philip Webb

Were they responding to the deeply felt and strongly expressed feelings of the inhabitants in both cases? It would be intriguing to know.

A quarter of a mile away, and also by Walter Brierley, is one of the minor masterpieces - but a masterpiece it certainly is - of Estate architecture in North Yorkshire, and that is the Water Tower of 1915 (*fig 12*). This recalls, in its rugged simplicity and strength, a Scottish tower house or a North Country fortified house and in that respect it harks back - perhaps consciously - to the design of Rounton Grange itself, the architectural *Urtext* for the family. The roof covering, as though to confirm that ancestry, is entirely of stone flags on a saddle-back roof. Brierley used smoothly dressed stones for the plinth, doorway, windows, corbel-course, and parapet; and there are strong corner gargoyles, adding to the castle-like air. But the whole building is, in a typically Arts & Crafts manner, a study in stone surfaces and their carefully judged treatment. There are vigorous quoins of roughly-dressed stone, and then differentiated from these in surface texture are the stones of the general walling, so laid as to create a lively pattern. Every single stone counts. Around the base is a decorative apron of black and white river-washed cobbles laid in geometrical patterns; in front of the doorway is laid the inscription, in cobbles, 'H & FB 1915'.

Directly opposite the Water Tower, as though to affirm the architectural continuity-in-diversity of the Estate is a cottage of the 'inkpot' type. The front to the street is amply asymmetrical, with a Webbish bay on the left and a three-light window on the right. Of stone, and pantiles, but with a tall brick chimney and at the base of the chimney a stone plaque which says simply 'HB 1909'. This seems to be by George Jack, and to pay homage to the West Lodge at East Rounton a mile away to the east. As in Webb's buildings for the Estate, the large stone blocks with their horizontal tooling reflect the vernacular farm buildings of the Cleveland Hills and North York Moors area.

In 1899 Lowthian Bell had been persuaded by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings - who regarded him, as a client of Webb's, as being ipso facto sympathetic to their cause, which was true - to purchase the adjoining Estate which included Mount Grace Priory, excavated by William St John Hope towards the end of the nineteenth century and found to be the most extensive survival of a Carthusian monastery in England.[5] The work by Ambrose Poynter has already been mentioned. The attitude of the client must have been crucial and at this distance in time it is inappropriate to be critical of the decision to reconstruct a monk's cell, in the form of a two-storey house; in any case it is a highly successful piece of presentation, encouraged still further by English Heritage's furnishing of the rooms and by the planting of the garden of that cell. Everything done to the surviving structures of the monastic church and ancillary buildings seems to have been exemplary, and worthy of study and emulation. In treating the Prior's Lodging as a Late Victorian country house, with a tactful addition at the back which is simplicity itself and cannot possibly be confused with old work, Poynter was already dealing with a house which had been turned into a fairly straightforward manor house in 1654.[6] His interiors are pleasing examples of minor work, very much in the vein of Philip Webb but without the strength or originality.

In 1901, Sir Lowthian added a new farmstead to the west of the site, beyond what is today the visitors' car-park, and this seems to be the work of George Jack rather than of Poynter, though it is difficult in the absence of documentation to be sure. Unusually for Sir Lowthian, the stone over the entrance porch says 'ILB 1901,' rather than 'LB' for Lowthian Bell.

The acquisition of Mount Grace Priory was in a way critical for the Bell family. Hearsay evidence is that Rounton Grange proved too soon impractical. It was actually changed three times during Philip Webb's and Lowthian Bell's lifetimes, twice by Webb himself and once by Jack. There is no diminution in affection or respect between client and architect, rather the reverse, towards the end of Sir Lowthian's life. Webb himself lived on nine years longer, but he had retired from

active practice, with a few exceptions, in January 1901. It may be rather that needs and expectations changed, especially after the first World War, and that the generation after the 'founding generation' needed to find its own way of living. Sir Hugh lived on until 1931, having had a very active business life at a time when the importance of steel was becoming paramount; he lacked the intellectual distinction of his father, so far as can be discerned, and his political career was a very minor one. He failed to secure a seat in Parliament, and his surviving election address to the citizens of the City of London does inspire. Socially he did well, having been His Majesty's Lieutenant for North Yorkshire from 1906 until his death, and that was usually an expensive honour to sustain at that time.

However or whatever the cause, 1926 was something of a watershed in the family's life: in that year his daughter by his first wife Gertrude, as intellectually gifted as her grandfather, died in Baghdad after a remarkable career as a scholar and stateswoman. From that year, or very soon afterwards, date the two most remarkable memorials in East Rounton church. The chancel east window 'To the glory of God and in memory of Sir Lowthian Bell and Margaret his wife this window was placed by their children and grandchildren.' The centre light shows St Lawrence with, significantly, Our Lady of Mount Grace in the background; the side lights show St Margaret and St Nicholas. It is by the distinguished Scottish stained glass artist Douglas Strachan, artistically a most imaginative choice, and is of a richly jewelled character, a real masterpiece.[7] The north window is one of the most extraordinary windows in any English parish church, not least because of the way in which the stonework and the glass have been brought together and refashioned to make one coherent work of art, of deep significance. It is a memorial to Gertrude and the new stone frame to the window has carved around the top and sides a few lines from a poem in Persian, which Gertrude herself had translated; the two lights of the stained glass window[8] are designated 'West' and 'East' and show, respectively, Magdalene College Oxford (she herself was at Lady Margaret Hall where in 1888 she obtained a first class in modern history - the first woman to achieve that distinction) and Khadimain. Below the window, the inscription on the stone frame records tersely 'Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell daughter of Hugh Bell and his wife Mary. Born at Washington Co Durham 14 July 1868 died at Baghdad 12 July 1926.' On the west reveal of the window the inscription explains further that 'This window is in remembrance of Gertrude versed in the learning of the east and of the west servant of the state scholar poet historian antiquary gardener mountaineer explorer lover of nature of flowers and of animals incomparable friend sister daughter,' and here I think we can discern the hand of her step-mother Florence, Lady Bell, the authoress, who edited many of Gertrude's letters in a handsome two-volume edition, and to whom she was as much an incomparable friend as a step-daughter. The whole project must have involved an infinity of time and commitment by the family, and the integration of stained glass window and carved stonework is possibly unique.

But the last word must be Gertrude's own, as the east reveal of the window gives her translation of the lines carved in Persian, and their elegiac character must stand as a testimony to the frailty of men and women, who with great vision and foresight fashion extensive estates and great buildings, but who cannot predict or provide what will happen to their legacies. The Rounton Estate, now flourishing again with a renewed burst of confidence linked to awareness of the sense of trusteeship which such an inheritance involves, but which in the years following the second World War fell - though it was not alone - to a low ebb and lost its greatest treasure, the noble house which Philip Webb had designed for the permanent home of the Bell family to be their very own, which contained so much that was rare and beautiful, and which provided shelter for a delightfully varied and gifted family, of whom none was more gifted or whose spirit rarer than this same Gertrude, who wrote:

‘When death comes to you,
All ye whose life sand thro the hour glass slips,
He lays two fingers on your ears and two
Upon your eyes, one on your lips,
Whispering “silence!”
We wither away but they wane not
The stars that above us rise
The mountains remain after us
And the strong towers
When we are gone.’

Although, in actuality, the ‘strong towers’ of Rounton Grange do not remain to us yet symbolically they are present and they shall never be forgotten so long as mankind has sensitivity towards and affection for architecture, for the architecture of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and for the work of that gentle but firm and ironic genius, Philip Webb, which was never more productive than when partnered by a sympathetic patron, in this case successively Sir Lowthian Bell and Sir Hugh Bell of the Rounton Estate, North Yorkshire, and their wives and families. This modest celebration of them all is dedicated to those members of the Bell family still living and to the memory of John Brandon-Jones.

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Figures

1 Rounton Grange, 1872-6, by Philip Webb (Photograph, Bell Family Archive)
2 The Rest House, provided for the refreshment and recuperation of urban employees of the Bell family (Photograph, from an early postcard, probably of the 1890s)
3 The coped grave marker designed by Philip Webb for Mary Bell, d. 1871, in West Rounton churchyard
4 Rounton Grange, East Rounton, North Yorkshire, one of the finest works of Philip Webb. Demolished
5 Mount Grace Priory, showing the local vernacular detail of a pantiled roof which has an edging of stone tiles close to the eaves. Webb always made a close study of local buildings before designing a new house
6 Rounton Grange, the dining room (Photograph, from an old photograph in the Bell Family Archive)
7 Red Barns, Redcar, North Yorkshire, the house built for Hugh Bell by Philip Webb, still surviving and in use as an hotel
8 The Old School, East Rounton, North Yorkshire, the village school designed by Philip Webb, now turned into a private house
9 East Rounton, North Yorkshire, the Home Farm of the Rounton Estate, designed by Philip Webb
10 East Rounton, the Coach House, designed by Philip Webb incorporating some Late Georgian vernacular farm buildings
11 Ingleby Cross, North Yorkshire, the village hall designed by Ambrose Poynter, one of series of public-spirited developments by Sir Hugh and Lady Bell
12 Ingleby Arnecliffe, The Water Tower, by Walter Brierley, the most distinguished of the Yorkshire-based Arts and Crafts architects and, as revealed by all his most characteristic works, a disciple of Philip Webb

(Photographs by Peter Burman, unless otherwise acknowledged)

Notes

[1] Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, Yorkshire: the North Riding,* Harmondsworth, 1966

[2] For another and relatively local example we can cite the first Lord Armstrong, a Newcastle armaments manufacturer, who bought a rural estate near Rothbury in Northumberland and commissioned for it a major country house, Cragside, designed by Webb's exact contemporary and near rival, Richard Norman Shaw. The whole estate was re-planned for Lord Armstrong, and was one of the first to use electricity, generated on the estate. The house and estate now belong to the National Trust and are open to the public, the industrial, technical and forestry activities being as interesting to observe as the house.

[3] In a poem called Booton Church, Norfolk in 'The Ancient People'. Booton Church was completed rebuilt in the late nineteenth century by the squire and rector of the village, the Revd Whitwell Elwin, who was also a talented amateur architect and stained glass designer as well as being a literary figure of some note.

[4] Quotations from W. R. Lethaby are all from his spirited and informative book *The Life and Work of Philip Webb*, published by Oxford University Press in 1925.

[5] Some crucial confirmatory correspondence survives in the SPAB Archive, 37 Spital Square, London E1 6DY

[6] See again fig 5

[7] Douglas Strachan was probably the most gifted Scottish stained glass artist of the first half of the

twentieth century, and there are outstanding examples of his work in Paisley Abbey, and in many important buildings in Edinburgh and elsewhere; but it was unusual for him to be commissioned to carry out work in a small parish church south of the Border, and it is intriguing to know through what contacts the commission came about.

[8] It is also by Douglas Strachan.

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