

Humshaugh Churchyard Story

Names - Isabella and Jacob Bell, also Margaret, Margaret Isabella, Thomas John, Sarah and Jane Ann Bell.

Grave - Close to the south-west corner of the church.

Text on Grave - Affectionate remembrance of Isabella, wife of Jacob Bell, who died at Humshaugh July 24th 1887, aged 53 years.

Also of Jacob, husband of the above, who died October 18th 1903, aged 67 years.

Also Margaret, their daughter who died at Wark Rectory, May 24th 1868, aged 8 years. *Interred at Wark.*

Also Margaret Isabella, their daughter who died at Humshaugh, June 25th 1886, aged 9 years.

Also Thomas John, their son who died at Humshaugh, July 29th 1890, aged 21 years.

Also Sarah, their daughter, who died January 25th 1903, aged 38 years.

Also Jane Ann, their daughter, who died at Humshaugh. (Any possible further inscription lost from bottom of the memorial.)

Jacob Bell was born in the parish of Tasset. Although the inscription on his gravestone and all census documentation suggests that he was born in 1836, Jacob was baptised at Greystead on 25th December 1834. He was the son of Joseph Bell, a farmer, and his wife Jane. In 1841, the family were living in the Wark area. By 1851, Jacob was a farm servant near Bellingham and, in 1859, he married Isabella Hedley of Birtley.

The 1861 census shows Jacob and his young family living at Birtley, where he worked as a railway labourer. His employment coincided with the building of the Border Counties Railway, which opened in stages between 1858 and 1862. The census lists two daughters, Margaret, 1, and Jane Ann, 3 months old. By 1871, the family were in Wark, where Jacob is described as a domestic servant. Other family members shown on the census were Jane - 10, Joseph - 8, James John - 4 and Thomas John - 2. Further investigation shows that they were at Wark Rectory, where Jacob worked as a gardener for the curate-in-charge, the Rev Hugh Taylor.

By 1881, the Bell family were living in Humshaugh, and Jacob is described as a gardener. Their move to Humshaugh coincided with that of the Rev Taylor and his sister, who took up residence at Humshaugh House. Later documentation confirms that the Bells lived in Manor Cottages, next to the family of John Vass, who was coachman to the Taylors. The Bells had six of their family at home, the eldest being Joseph - 18, who was also a gardener. Also at home were James John - 14, Thomas John - 12, Jacob - 9, Gabriel - 7 and Margaret Isabella - 4.

On 24th July 1887, Isabella Bell died at the early age of 53. In 1891, Jacob was still a gardener at Humshaugh House and his two eldest daughters had moved back into the family home to keep house for him. By this time Jane Ann was 30 and Sarah 26. Their 19-year old brother Jacob is described as a general labourer and the 17-year old Gabriel, as a gardener's apprentice, presumably working with his father. In 1901, At the age of 65, Jacob was still working as a gardener. His daughter Sarah was now officially listed as his housekeeper and the 27-year old Gabriel as a gardener like his father. Jacob Bell died on 18th October 1903, aged 67. He was buried at St Peter's on 21st October and, by a sad coincidence, John Vass, his neighbour of many years, was buried the following day on 22nd October. They were both long-standing employees of Miss Taylor at Humshaugh House, which may account for the similar fine headstones erected to both families.

The inscriptions on the Bell monument tell us that their first child, Margaret, died on 24th May 1868, at Wark Rectory, aged 8. She is interred at St Michael's, Wark. Margaret Isabella Bell also died young, at the age of 9. She died in Humshaugh on 25th June 1886 and was buried at St Peter's three days later on 28th June. Thomas John Bell died at the age of 21, on 29th July 1890 and was buried on 1st August. Born in Wark, Thomas John was baptised at St Michael's on 15th April 1869. The 1881 census shows him as a scholar in Humshaugh. As he died before the next census was taken, it is not possible to say what his employment was, although he may also have worked as a gardener with his father.

In 1881, Sarah Bell and her sister, Jane Ann, were both listed as visitors at Humshaugh House. Sarah was described as having outdoor employment and Jane Ann as a 'housemaid out of place'. This would suggest that they were in temporary positions there, as they were described as visitors, rather than servants. As previously stated, Jane Ann and Sarah Bell had both moved into the family home by 1891, following the death of their mother. No employment is mentioned, although they were obviously keeping house for their father.

On the 1901 census, the 36-year old Sarah was described as the housekeeper for her father and 29-year old brother Gabriel. Their elder brother, Joseph Hedley Bell was living with his wife and young daughter in a nearby house. He was now a coachman, having taken over from the aging John Vass. Sarah Bell predeceased her father by 9 months, dying on the 25th January 1903, at the age of 38. The gravestone inscription tells us that Jane Ann Bell died in Humshaugh, but the details are no longer visible. Jane Ann was not in the family home in 1901, as she was working as a lady's maid for the Cruddas family at Haughton Castle. By 1911, at the age of 50, she was back in Humshaugh, as housekeeper to her brother Gabriel, who was still a gardener at Humshaugh House. A probate record shows that Jane Ann Bell died on 9th September 1917. Her address is given as Taylor's Cottages, Humshaugh, although this is undoubtedly the family home in Manor Cottages. We find the current name of the houses, Manor Cottages, on Gabriel's record of probate when he died in 1938. He had married in 1918 and his widow and daughter are listed in Manor Cottages on the 1939 register.

