JOHN BELL

of

LONDONDERRY

and his

SCOTTISH ANCESTRY

FOREWORD

FOR AS MUCH as just two hundred summers have passed since staunch John Bell, our immigrant ancestor, crossing the sea, cast his lot with the granite of New Hampshire, it seems fitting that there should be now recorded so much regarding his turbulent ancestry as the mists of years disclose. I have, therefore, set down the facts as they are derived from ancient documents, and from well defined tradition preserved to us by our Scottish kinsfolk and those of the elder generations now forth-fared, lest they be forgotten with the rest that remains beyond our ken.

LOUIS BELL.

December, 1920.

JOHN BELL OF LONDONDERRY AND HIS SCOTTISH ANCESTRY

JOHN BELL, the immigrant ancestor of our family, was born in the Parish of Ballymoney, near Coleraine, County Antrim, Ireland, in the year 1678. He emigrated to this Country in 1719 to join the just formed Scotch-Irish colony in Londonderry, New Hampshire. [These dates are on the authority of a note in the Ulster Journal of Archeology, 1895.] He certainly was not of the first little group of emigrants who, coming from about Londonderry, Ireland, late in 1718, originally settled in Londonderry, New Hampshire, in April, 1719, but he must have joined them very soon, since his homestead was granted in 1720.

This original tract was of sixty acres, in Aiken's range. It lay about a mile northwest of what is now Derry Lower Village, on the present main road to Londonderry and Manchester, and within the bounds of the present town of Derry. It was later extended to three hundred acres, and for more than a century remained in the family. Early the next year he was granted, in company with William and James Aiken, Andrew Todd, John Wallace and Benjamin Willson, saw-mill rights on Aiken's Brook with an adjacent acre of land for the mill yard.

Lest the proprietors should profiteer, the thrifty Scots of the settlement stipulated that the inhabitants of the town should have the refusal of boards on hand at thirty shillings per thousand feet, or for sawing alone should be charged fifteen shillings per thousand. The same year he was appointed one of the surveyors of the town, and helped build the first meeting house.

He cleared ground for his home, built a log cabin upon it, appears in the records of 1722 as one of the chartered proprietors, and in that year returned to Ireland and brought back with him his wife and two daughters, Letitia and Naomi, whom he had left pending the preparation of a home for them in the new country. These daughters were small children at the time; and although the date of John Bell's marriage is not of record, it was probably about 1610.

His wife, Elizabeth Todd, was the daughter of ~~John~~ James Todd and Rachel Nelson, and was born in the Western Isles of Scotland. Her family was evidently of substance, two of her brothers being graduates of Edinburgh University. By tradition she was a woman of great energy and capacity, blond, with the conspicuously red hair associated generally with Keltic blood, and which has come down now to the fifth generation of her descendants. The story is told of her that on this voyage over in 1722 the Captain of the ship got drunk and went into delirium tremens. In this emergency Mrs. Bell, who was the only other person aboard who knew anything of navigation, performed the then somewhat slender duties of navigating officer for the remainder of the voyage.

Four children were born to John and Elizabeth Bell, after their settlement in Londonderry; Samuel, September 28, 1723; Elizabeth, December 28, 1725; Mary, January 25, 1727-8; and John, August 15, 1730.

John Bell seems to have been a useful and substantial citizen of Londonderry, often trusted with serious responsibilities for the town. He was for years a member of the committee having charge of the regulation and distribution of the meadow lands in the town, and in 1733 was appointed one of the proprietors' committee on titles and law suits which might arise

from them. He was one of the "surveyors" for his part of the town up to substantially the end of his life, and in 1737 was elected Selectman, although for some unknown reason he apparently did not serve out his term.

Around him on his wide acres grew up his children, of whom John eventually succeeded to the paternal estate in Londonderry. Samuel, the elder son, served a brief enlistment in the little Londonderry company of rangers raised during the French and Indian war, and soon after, about 1760, emigrated to Cambridge, New York, and married Sarah Storrow. He, with two sons, fought in the Revolution, and they were captured in Burgoyne's advance. He survived to the age of eighty and left numerous descendants, who have quite passed from the sight of their New Hampshire kindred.

John Bell, the immigrant, died July 8, 1743, leaving his extremely efficient widow, who survived until 1771, and her two young sons to carry on the homestead. The four daughters, growing up, all married Duncans, three of them brothers.

Tradition has it that after acquiring three Duncan sons-in-law the widow Elizabeth felt need of a change; and when her youngest was swung upon a pillion by the last available Duncan and they bolted for the parson's, Mrs. Bell saddled her horse and set out in furious pursuit. The fugitives, however, got around a turn of the road, jumped their horse behind a friendly wood-pile, and, after the irate mother-in-law-elect had passed, doubled on their course and were married, quite probably by the Rev. Ebenezer Flagg of Chester, who had a wide reputation for assisting in such impromptu nuptials. A genial and hospitable Dominie, doubtless, was the Rev. Ebenezer, since in an old account book of the Chester village store I found him charged with

twenty-eight quarts of "Rhom" (W.I.&N.E.) within the short space of thirty days.

It was the younger son John, our immediate ancestor, who carried on for near a century in Londonderry. He first appears in the town records as taking up his father's work of "surveyor" in 1762; and by the outbreak of the Revolution he had become a forceful and permanent figure in town affairs. In the spring of 1775 he was made Town Clerk and a member of the Committee of Safety, and in the autumn he was elected to the Provincial Congress which met at Exeter, December 21, 1775, and which early in the next year resolved itself into a House of Representatives.

Through the strenuous years of 1776 and 1777 John Bell was a member of this House and attended its seven sessions. He was appointed Justice of the Peace for Rockingham County June 11, 1776, and served many years thereafter. A few days later he was made Muster Master for part of the New Hampshire forces.

There is a vague tradition that he was with John Stark at Bennington; but the facts are against it, since through most of the period of the Bennington campaign he was in active service in the Legislature, and his name does not appear on the roll of men from Londonderry in that struggle. The tradition evidently confuses him with John Bell, Jr., of Bedford, who was indeed present at the famous fight.

In 1778 he was appointed to enlist soldiers for Colonel Thornton's regiment; and March 30, 1781, he was appointed Colonel of the Eighth Regiment of Militia, earlier led by his townsman, Colonel William Gregg. A little later he was made a Special Justice of the Court of Common Pleas; and from 1786 to 1790 and again in 1791 served as State Senator and was active in public life up to the beginning of the 19th century, when he

drew out of affairs and settled down to a useful and serene old age.

He was a man of great keenness and intelligence, a voluminous reader for those days, and withal of immense physical powers. He stood six feet one inch in height, and in his earlier days was a famous wrestler. It is told of him that even in old age finding on Town Meeting day two of the young men fighting behind the town house, he grabbed them by their collars and with the injunction, "Fighting, boys? Ye should not fight," lifted them from the ground and banged their heads together until they surrendered at discretion.

He was a sincerely religious man, deacon in the church for many years; and one old gentleman who knew him told me that he could hear, old Squire Bell at family prayers "Clear over to my house, nigh half a mile."

Strong of body and of mind, he apparently bore the reputation of being equally strong of head; for the tale goes that after a certain town-fair in Londonderry one of the members of the church was found the next morning quite dead to the world, behind a fence. His evident excesses raised a scandal, and he was brought before the Church for discipline, whereupon he raised the following ingenious plea: "I admit that I was drunk and sleeping it off under the fence, but now there was old Deacon Bell drank twice as much as I did, and it never touched him, and why I should be disciplined because my head ain't so strong as the Deacon's I can't quite see."

The decision in the case has not been handed down, but if the Deacon's flip-glass (I have seen —It would hold near an imperial quart) were the true measure of his thirst, he probably would not have voted for the Eighteenth Amendment.

His regard for the Sabbath, always notable, seemed to grow with age; and it is told of him that when his son Samuel, then a United States Senator, drove over from Chester to see him one Sunday, the old Deacon drew himself up, despite his nearly five and ninety years, and in the broad Scotch of his forefathers informed his offspring that if he could not come to see his old father without breaking the Sabbath he need not come at all.

John Bell married, December 21, 1758, Mary Ann (or Marian) Gilmore, a woman of great beauty and good sense. Twelve children were born to them, a large family even in those days, and it is little wonder that in the ancestral house a dining table of huge dimensions was literally built in as a permanent fixture, to meet the necessities of the case. The house has long since disappeared.

Only four of John Bell's children left descendants; Susannah, the oldest, who married John Dinsmore, Esq.; Mary, the youngest, who married William Anderson of Londonderry; and the two sons, John and Samuel, our own immediate ancestors, for many years notable figures in New Hampshire and both Governors of their native State.

John Bell's long life covered well nigh half his country's history. In his boyhood he might well have talked with those who had heard the story of the Mayflower from the lips of her last survivors. He lived to see the new nation ten million strong, stretching continent-wide, its flag honored over the seven seas. November 30, 1825, he died, having survived his beloved wife a little more than three years. The portrait which here appears is from a sketch taken a few months before his death by the hand of his grandson, Doctor John Bell.

Concerning the more remote history of the Bell family little was recorded until I chanced upon the Scottish trail a few years ago. It was known that the father of John, the immigrant, was Matthew Bell, and that he had been born in Kirkconnell, Scotland, somewhere about 1650, and had emigrated to join the Scotch-Irish colony near Londonderry at some time prior to the Siege of Londonderry, in which he participated, in 1688-9.

The only relic of Matthew in the possession of the family is the silver handle of his riding whip, which in those days would have bespoken him as well-to-do. This is owned by Samuel Kent Bell, Esq., of Exeter, and bears the initials "M.B." This Matthew Bell had, beside John the immigrant of Londonderry, an older son, Matthew, who came about 1710, to New York, and thence moved to Lancaster county, Pennsylvania.

Matthew, the son, was born near Coleraine about 1677. He is believed to have married in Ireland and he had four sons, Samuel, William, John and Joseph. The first named was born about 1732, and his youngest son Samuel, born about 1771, moved to Davidson County, Tennessee, where he was Justice of the Peace. His son John Bell, born in Davidson County, February 15, 1798, was representative in Congress 1827–41; Speaker of the house 1834; Secretary of War under President W. H. Harrison in 1841; Senator from Tennessee 1847–1859; and candidate of the Constitutional Union Party for President in 1860. Two other sons of Matthew moved to Virginia and the grandson of one of them, Peter Hansborough Bell, was the Governor of Texas 1849–1853, while of the same kin came Senator Samuel Bell Maxey of Texas.

In attempting to trace the connection of Matthew Bell of Kirkconnell to the Scottish families of that name, I met no success until I chanced, in a book on the old

Scottish families, upon a line of descent reaching straight from Kirkconnell in Annandale, to Joseph Bell, M.D., F. R. C. S., of 2 Melville Crescent, Edinburgh, one of a line of distinguished surgeons who for several generations had taught in Edinburgh University; and himself, Sir Conan Doyle's Professor in Surgery and the original from which Sherlock Holmes was sketched.

I started correspondence with Dr. Bell and he immediately assured me that my surmise had been well founded and that Matthew of Kirkconnell must unquestionably have been a kinsman of the family of which he was the living representative. Dr. Bell was good enough to examine for me what scanty records have been published regarding the emigration from that part of Scotland into Ireland, without, however, finding the name of Matthew recorded; a circumstance which later investigation as to the probable time of his emigration made very simple of explanation; the fact being, as nearly as can be judged from the family history at about that period, that the emigration took place just before or at the time of the Restoration, so that Matthew, if any notice were taken of small boys in the imperfect records, would have appeared merely as a child in an emigrating family.

It is needless to say that I have great confidence in Dr. Joseph Bell's judgment on the matter, as he had kept in close touch with his Scottish ancestry, of which he was justly proud.

From this point backwards the story of the Bells is easily traced as one of the families who "Kepit the marches in the days of eld." Their arms are hung in the great hall at Abbottsford, in the long line of border families with the history of which Sir Walter Scott was so familiar.

To begin then, at the beginning, the name Bell was

originally Le Bel, and of Norman origin.* The Bells were retainers of De Brus, who came over with Duke William in 1066. With De Brus, after the conquest, they drifted to the north of England along with other Norman followers; and when David I, King of Scotland, invited Robert de Brus, son of the Norman Robert, into Scotland, the Bells were among those who followed him. King David gave a grant of Annandale to Robert de Brus in 1124 and it was in this Annandale country, therefore, that the Bells settled.

Of the particular branch of the Bell family here concerned, the first definite record is in 1404, when the keep of Blacket House was built, in what is now a smiling stretch of border country, about five miles north of Annan. This tower of Blacket House, and the ruin of the adjacent part of later date, still stands, gray and ivy covered, with the inscription "W.B. 1404" cut over the door.

The doorway is now hardly more than four feet high from the filling in of mould around the old tower, which is perhaps fifty feet high and fifteen feet square, built of old red sandstone, weathered gray by the centuries. The name of the original proprietor was probably William, long a common name in the history of this branch of the family. This must have been the original important holding of the family in that vicinity, but by whom granted is not known.

In 1426 the neighboring estate of Kirkconnell was granted to William Bell by Archibald, Earl of Douglas. This estate lay on the banks of the little river Kirtle, perhaps a couple of miles from Blacket House; and upon it was presently erected the "Bells Tower" of Kirkconnell.

Still later the neighboring estate known as Godsbrig came into the possession of a branch of the Bell family,

* By tradition of the Scottish kin the Le Bel who swung sword with the invaders was Robert.

L.B.

so that these three groups of kinsmen, the Bells of Blacket House, of Kirkconnell, and of Godsbrig, formed one small border clan in the edge of the "debatable lands" along the English border, whose people knew no liege save the sword.

Blacket House and its neighborhood were in the Parish of Middlebie, adjacent to the Parish of Gretna, well known in Scottish history. Just when the Kirkconnell tower, now long destroyed, was built, is uncertain, but it is mentioned in an Act of Parliament providing for the safety of the border in 1481 as "Bellis Tour," and three years later James of Douglas and the Duke of Albany passed in this castle the night before their defeat at Lochmaben.

They were wild-riding borderers, these Bells, raiding the English and being raided in turn, living with hand on sword ready for a foray.

An epitaph, which I owe to the courtesy of Dr. Joseph Bell, bears witness to their strenuous life. The stone stood in the Parish of Gretna until about the year 1816, when it was destroyed in making road improvements. It bore the date 1510, and the following appreciation of the deceased:

"Here lyeth W. Bell, of his age eighty yheres.
Here bluidy Bell, baith skin and bane,
Lies quietly still aneath this stane,
He was a stark moss-trooper kent
As ever drave about o'er bent,
He hynt ye Lockwood tower and hall,
And dang ye lady o'er ye wall,
For whilk ye Johnstone, stout and wight,
Set Blacket a' in low by night,
While cried a voice, as if frae Hell,
Haste, open ye gates for Bluidy Bell."

W. Bell, doubtless another William, was most evidently an impolite old gentleman who died with his boots on. The other moss-troopers of his kin seem to have been little more pacific.

In 1541 an exasperated communication from King James V of Scotland to Henry VIII, touching the keeping of peace in the marches, enumerates certain of the borderers who were constantly causing trouble, in these words:

"Diverse tratouris and theivis and brekaris of the trewis, and specialie ane Andro Bell . . . . Wille Bell callit the Flaggat . . . . Thomas Bell callit the Smy, ... "quhilkis dayly stelis, rydis, and gydis." (Smy = "mean cuss").

The next year one Willie Bell, perhaps the same here referred to, distinguished himself by capturing Oliver Sinclair at the battle of Solway Moss.

In 1547 the dominion of this territory seems to have passed temporarily to the English, and many of the families of the West Marches took oath to the King of England after Lord Wharton's coming to clear up the situation. Among these names of "Gentlemen and Principall Headsmen" and their respective followers are, "Bells of Tofteyeates 142, Bells of Tindells 112;" and a nearly contemporaneous record of the pledges filed for such loyalty includes also the "Bells of Tofteyeates, Kyrkconwell land, Mydlebye and the Kyrk cccxij."

This group apparently took in all the ramifications of the Bell clan along the West Marches. Several generations of hard fighting apparently had their effect in reducing the number of the clan, since in a military report on the West Marches prepared by an English official between 1563 and 1566, is the following enumeration of the Scottish families of Bells: "The Belles of Myddilbie, called of Castell Mylk xxvj horsemen, The

Belles of Carrutheres and Toffyates xiiij horsemen; The Belles of Tyndale; Dave Bell of the Bog, x horsemen," to which is added the significant comment, "This surnem dekeyeth." Nevertheless, the family forces seem to have risen again. They probably well earned the sobriquet of the "Murdering Bells" which Sir Walter Scott has handed down to us, without being worse or better than their quarrelsome neighbors.

In 1585 William Bell of Blacket House is mentioned in an action of indemnity concerning squaring accounts on the border; and in 1586 in a similar matter he made a claim for the burning of Godsbrig and the loss of three thousand kine and oxen, four thousand sheep and goats and five hundred horses, the total *ad damnum* being set at forty thousand pounds. Even allowing for a claimant's imagination the fortunes of the family must have been well settled.

This William Bell had five brothers, Wat, Thom, Francis, Richie, and John; and there were still others of the clan in the neighborhood, since in Monypeny's Chronicle (1587) are enumerated the lairds and gentlemen of Dumfriesshire, and among the twenty "Chief men of name, not being lairds" are found Will Bell of Alby, John Bell, Andro Bell, Matthie Bell, Will Bell of Redkirk. Matthie was known as "The King," Andro as "Lokkis Andro," and Will, the end of the list, as "Redcloke," names beautifully suggestive of Bad Pete, Alkali Ike, Bowieknife Bill and the rest.

Their activities in evening up the Border score may be judged from the following samples from the Border records among many others in which they figure:

"August, 1589, John Bulman 'tenant to my Lord Scropp in Gillesland' against Watte Bell of Mydleby-hill, Jock Goodfellowe, Thome Tomson of the Maynholme of Hodholme for five kye."

"12th June, 1590, John Grame of Sark against John Bell, brother to Reydcloik, John Johnston of the innergarth dwelling of the Water of Mylk, for a brown bay naig."

At this time Bell of Blacket house was the recognized head of the family thereabout and the whole tribe was *persona non grata* to the English, as witness the following from Lord Scrope's report:

"The governance of Scotland most offensive to England lyeth in two wardes; in Annerdale and Liddesdale. . . . .

. . . . For the country of Annerdale is stronge by theire great and many surnames as Maxwelles Johnstones Armestronges Irwaines Belles and Carlilles. Every which severall surname defende theire owne as shall apeare by devision of theire dwellinges here under written.

Boneshowe. About Kirtle is a surname of Irwins a surname of proper men.

Bridekirk. Above them is a great surname of Belles and Carlilles who hath bene longe in fede with the Irwins.

Annan, Lougwood. Towardes the meetinge of Annan and the Water of Milk and of both sides thereof att Loughwood, dwelleth the Lard Johnson and 300 sufficient men of his name.

Also at Sark, Johnsons.

At Kinmont, Armestronges.

At Dumfreys and Hoddam, Lord Maxwell and Lord Harrys.

Here is all the surnames in Annerdale that is stronge at this daie."

Such is the roster of the Bells and their neighbors, friend and foe. With the powerful Maxwells at Caerlaverock the Bells were friendly, with the John-

stons on dubious terms. Willie Bell, "Red-Cloak," seems to have been the leader in fight and foray, and it was he who took active part in the dare-devil storming of Carlisle Castle to rescue Will Armstrong of Kinmont; an exploit which Lord Scrope, under whose very nose it took place, somewhat peevishly recorded thus in a letter to Elizabeth's Privy Council under date of April 14, 1596:

"I thought it my duty to acquaint you with the proude attempte wh. the Scots have made on this her Majesty's castle & chief strength here, praying you to move her Majesty for such redress as may stand with her liking . . . . "

"Yesternight in the deade time thereof Walter Scott of Hardinge, the cheife man aboute Buclughe, accompanied with 500 horsmen of Buclughes & Kinmontes frindes, did come armed & appointed with gavlockes and crowes of iron, hand peckes, axes, and skailinge lathers, into an owtewarde corner of the base courte of this castell and to the posterne dore of the same. w. they undermined speedily quietlye and made themselves possessors of the base courte, brake into the chamber where Will of Kinmont was, carried him awaye, and in their discoverie by the Watch lefte for dead two of the watchmen, hurt a servant of Myne, one of Kynmontes Keepers, and were issued again out of the postern before they were discovered by the watch of the innerwarde."

Names of the principal assailants, "The Laird of Buceleugh, Walter Scott of Goldelandes . . . . Willie Bell redcloake and 2 of his brethren. . . . . Walter Bell of Godesby," etc., etc.

It was during the troublous generations just recorded that some of the picturesque traditions of the family had their origin amid the feuds of the border families.

The Irvings, with whom the Bells were long at feud, possessed themselves of Kirkconnell tower and scattered the Kirkconnell Bells among their kin. The Irvings retained their ill-gotten gains only to the year 1600, when they were driven out by the Maxwells, whose great castle of Caerlaverock lay a few miles to the westward.

Whether "Fair Helen of Kirkconnell" was a Bell or an Irving is disputed by the two clans; but since tradition seems to be definite that a Bell of Blacket House was the disappointed suitor who fired the fatal shot which Helen, throwing herself in front of her lover, Adam Fleming, received, probability would indicate that the tragedy occurred before the Irvings held Kirkconnell: for tradition states that fair Helen's family were pressing the claims of Bell of Blacket House; likely enough if he was one of her kinsmen, highly improbable if he had been the son of a family reckoned in that time as deadly enemies.

At all events, the murderous suitor may comfortably be eliminated from the possible line of ancestry, since Adam Fleming in the ballad recounts, "I hacked him in pieces sma'." Whatever Helen's name, near the tiny ruined chapel of Kirkconnell, on the banks of the Kirtle where the lovers met, they lie buried together, with a great time-shattered cross of red sandstone above them.

To this period, too, belongs another of the sanguinary traditions of Blacket House. In the meadow below the ruined tower, separated from it by a hundred and fifty yards of greensward, stands a huge oak, gnarled and venerable, which tradition, handed down by Dr. Joseph Bell, connects with the Irving feud. It seems that one of the Irvings was prowling about looking for trouble, when the then master of Blacket House, from the doorway of his keep, loosed an arrow which killed

the intruder. The Bell then buried him where he fell and planted over him an acorn now grown to the oak which still stands to mark his grave.

The door posts of the tower of Blacket House are worn deep where the successive generations of owners sharpened scythe or sword when they went forth to peace or war; and for years after their passing, the ruin bore the name of being haunted by a bogle.

In reproof for the warlike tendencies of the neighborhood King James VI, in 1597, went down to the Western Marches to enforce quiet and took hostages of the Johnstones, Armstrongs, Bells, Irvings, and other raiders of the border. I may add that the Irving feud was eventually settled, and there have been several inter-marriages between the Bells of Blacket House and their erstwhile foes.

The tower over which the Bells and Irvings struggled is completely ruined and I was unable to find any trace of it, although history recites that from it was obtained a stone which bore the arms of Bell of Kirkconnell, which are of record as "Azure three bells or." A writer in *The Scotsman* very positively states that the family bore as crest a hand holding a dagger, proper, with the motto "I beir the Bell," i.e., "I am The Bell," Bell of Kirkconnell having been in earlier times recognized as the head of the clan. As, however, the use of the crest was not official in Scotland until well into the seventeenth century, and was never definitely regulated, that item of the armorial bearings is somewhat informal. The belled falcon was a rather common crest among the Bells, and the arms which are current in our own family are substantially those of Bell of Provosthaugh with a motto adopted by the late Dr. Luther V. Bell.

The fortunes of war seem to have broken the fortunes

of the Bells, although they still held Blacket House and Godsbrig. In 1644 John Bell of Blacket House was indicted for the killing of Irwyn of Braes, but escaped by pleading a remission from the King, and later, in 1648, was one of the Commissioners of War in the shire of Dumfries, supporting the Government of the "Protector."

With the Restoration, the Government laid a heavy hand on the Scottish supporters of the Parliament, and George Bell of Godsbrig, in 1662, was fined a thousand pounds as acting treasonably toward the King in the Civil War. The family was undoubtedly much broken in this time of stress and there is a very strong probability that it was during this period that Matthew Bell with others of his kin slipped over into the friendly colony of Scots already assembled around Londonderry.

That several of the name were involved in this emigration is altogether likely; and one is perhaps justified in surmising that Matthew may have had a brother John, since there came, about 1736, to Bedford, next door to the Londonderry Scotch-Irish, a John Bell; born in Ireland, 1696, who was believed by my late great uncle, Governor C. H. Bell, to have been a cousin of the John who cast his lot with the Londonderry colony; but of this relationship there is no definite proof, and I am quite satisfied to have been able at least to connect Matthew of Kirkconnell with his Scottish kinsfolk. They are, so far as I am able to ascertain, all gone from the banks of the Kirtle, leaving only the gray tower of Blacket House and the venerable oak in the meadow below as witnesses of their long and turbulent history.