

Clan BELL

ARMS	Azure, a fess between three bells Or
CREST	A hand holding a dagger proper
MOTTO	Signum pacis amor (Love is the token of peace)



The Borders family of Bell may well descend from a Norman follower of David I who reigned until 1153 and was, by the end of the thirteenth century, well established in Dumfriesshire, Berwickshire and Perthshire. The name may derive from the French 'bel', meaning 'fair' or 'handsome'. Since the derivation is descriptive, common ancestry cannot be assumed for all those bearing the surname. The arms attributed to the principal family are in the nature of canting, or punning, heraldry, alluding to the pronunciation of the name rather than its origin. The suggestion that it relates to living beside a bell tower seems far fetched. The Bells participated in the Borders disturbances as one of the riding clans of the Border Reivers. In the thirteenth century Gilbert Le Fitzbel held lands in Dumfries. Sir David Bell was Clerk of the Wardrobe to Robert II. In 1426 William Bell's lands of Kirkconnel were confirmed by James I under a charter recorded in the register of the great seal. The Bells, along with other Borders families, became increasingly turbulent throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Crown's determination to pacify the borders led in 1517 to the Clan Bell receiving royal letters of warning to keep the peace. The tower of Blacket House was destroyed in a raid by the English in 1547. After the union of the Crowns in 1603 the family suffered much the same fate as the other Border Reivers: many immigrated to the new plantation lands in Ulster, where the name is among the twenty most numerous in that province. Others settled further afield throughout Australia and New Zealand. The descendents of the Lairds of Blacket House stayed in the realm but moved to the cities where they contributed substantially to learning and in particular medical science. Andrew Bell, founder of the Madras system of education, was born at St Andrews in 1753. The college founded in his native town and named after his system is still a respected seat of education today. Dr Joseph Bell, great-grandson of Benjamin Bell of Blacket House, who was himself a distinguished surgeon, is said to have inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to create his great detective, Sherlock Holmes. General Sir John Bell was a distinguished soldier during the Napoleonic Wars and a friend of the duke of Wellington. Scottish lawyers encounter the name of Bell in their study of *Principals of the Law of Scotland* by George Joseph Bell, Professor of Scots Law at the University of Edinburgh in 1829. More recently, Alexander Graham Bell was a pioneer in the development of the telephone. Although the Bells were a Borders family, there are others of this name who are of Highland origin, and in that case, Bell is held to be a sept of Macmillan.

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