

"I fear that Mr Gill is rather
extravagant..."

- William Forsyth 13th May 1914

The Holland Martin Archives contain eight letters relating to the Bromley-Martin memorial at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Hook Common, Upton on Severn.

The three correspondents are Susan Bromley-Martin (Charlotte Susan Henrietta Bromley-Martin 1864-1946) and the sculptors William Forsyth (1833-1915) of Worcester, and Eric Gill (1882-1940) then of Ditchling Common, Sussex. The correspondence begins on 12 May 1914 with a letter from William Forsyth to Susan Bromley-Martin asking for further information in advance of preparing a cost estimate for the work at Hook. It concludes on 5 September 1914 with a letter from William Forsyth to Susan Bromley-Martin explaining his account, and chasing payment for outstanding items.

It is not known whether William Forsyth received final payment. By the Autumn of 1914, Susan Bromley-Martin was busy with her three sisters establishing the Hôpital Temporaire, the voluntary and civilian British hospital unit at the Château d'Arc-en-Barrois, Haute-Marne, France, which served wounded soldiers of the French 3rd Army Corps at the start of World War 1.

Eric Gill is credited (Pevsner) as the letter-carver of the two monumental tablets (1906 and 1914) to Susan Bromley-Martin's parents at the nearby St Peter and St Paul Parish Church, Upton upon Severn, although neither is signed. In 1914, the third correspondent, Eric Gill, was working on the 'Stations of the Cross' at Bentley's neo-Byzantine Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral in London, and this may be the reason why the cutting of the inscription at Hook was sub-contracted to William Forsyth.

George Edward Bromley-Martin (1829-1905) was the first person to be buried at the Church of the Good Shepherd at Hook Common, and the correspondence relates to the task of adding the details of his wife, Maria Henrietta Bromley-Martin nee Cherry, to his memorial cross some nine years after his death in 1905. It is not known whether this memorial cross was carved by William Forsyth or by Eric Gill.

Certainly William Forsyth had been commissioned earlier (in 1874) by George Edward Bromley-Martin to make the memorial to his uncle, Joseph John Martin, had died in 1873 without issue. It was from this uncle that George Edward Bromley-Martin inherited the Ham Court estate, near Upton upon Severn.

The correspondence indicates that the memorial inscription to Maria Henrietta Bromley-Martin nee Cherry, who died in Kensington, London, on 15 October 1912, was drawn by Eric Gill and subsequently cut by one of William Forsyth's sons. By 1914, William Forsyth was 80 years old, and was to die the following year. The son who undertook the letter-cutting was probably his youngest child, Charles Gabriel Forsyth (1869-1961), who also worked as a stone and wood carver.

As he noted in his letters to Susan Bromley-Martin, William Forsyth feared that Eric Gill's proposals for both inscriptions were both "rather extravagant" and "rather expensive." Although he did receive payment for his son cutting the new inscription, there is no record of him having been paid for the additional time spent re-cutting the earlier inscription as instructed by Eric Gill. In short, Gill's greater ambition was, literally, at William Forsyth's expense.

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NOTES:

1. Correspondence (Worcestershire Archives Ref. 8397/91/(x))
2. Bromley-Martin Genealogy
3. Ham Court, Upton upon Severn
4. Church of the Good Shepherd, Hook Common, near Upton upon Severn
5. St Peter and St Paul Parish Church, Upton upon Severn
6. Eric Gill.

1. Correspondence

Letter #1

May 12th 1914

Memorandum From W. Forsyth Sculptor

Studio & Works. 6, Tything, Worcester

To Miss Bromley Martin

Madam, I beg to thank you for your kind letter of the 11th inst, and beg to say in answer to your first [underlined] question that there would be no necessity to move the Cross or raise it.

Secondly, [underlined] I could not give you a correct estimate of the cost, without seeing the design and character / of the letters.

Thirdly, [underlined] the cost of cutting the name dates etc leaving out the Text, would depend on the number and character of the letters. If you would kindly send me the design I would give you every particular.

I beg also to add, that the man that I would send to do the work, think that he has cut letters drawn out by Mr Gill for Chrish Church Brixton for Professor Beresford Pite F.R.I.B.A.

I am Madam Faithfully yours William Forsyth

Letter #2

May 13th 1914

Studio & Works. 6, Tything, Worcester

Miss Bromley Martin

Madam, I beg to submit m estimate for the lettering at Hook church, and beg to say to carry out Mr Gills suggestion the cost would be including all expenses £3-10-0 but if the Text was included the cost would be £5-5-0. I fear that Mr Gill is rather extravagant in his P and other letters.

I am Madam Faithfully yours William Forsyth

Letter # 3

Ditchling Common Sx 7. '14

Dear Miss Martin:

I hope you will find the enclosed line in order and that the letter cutter is doing the work satisfactorily.

Thank you very much for your hospitality last Wednesday night. I enjoyed my short visit very much indeed.

I am yours sincerely Eric Gill

Letter #4

Ditchling Common Sussex July 7 1914 To Miss Susan Bromley Martin

Dr. to Eric Gill for making drawings for additional inscription on Cross at the Hooke Churchyard, Upton-on-Severn including time & expenses incurred by visit to the Churchyard to see letter-cutter as estimated, the sum of nine pounds & 3/- £9.3.0 Paid Aug 1st 1914 Eric Gill

Letter #5

July 29th 1914

Studio & Works. 6, Tything, Worcester

Eric Gill Esqre.

Dear Sir, I beg to say that my son has finished the inscription at the Hook, and as you suggested to cut the other inscription a little deeper in places he is doing that. But by what he tells me to go over all the

inscription would take some time which would be rather expensive would kindly let me know your feeling on the matter.

I am dear Sir Faithfully yours William Forsyth

Letter #6

Aug 4th 1914 5 & 6, Tything, Worcester
Miss Bromley Martin Co W. Forsyth Sculptor
1914

Feb 7th To man going to Hook Church and taking a rubbing of inscription including rail [0].5.10

[ditto] 21 To drawing Inscription for approval [0].3.4

July 1st To man going to Hook Church to meet Mr Gill 7 1/2 hours including rail expenses [0].9.1

[ditto] 28 To cutting Inscription as per estimate 3.10.[0]

Aug 1st To cutting old Inscription as suggested by Mr Gill 34 hours 1.9.9 Hire of Cycle [0].4.[0] / £6.2.0

Letter #7 Aug 26th 1914

Memorandum From W. Forsyth Sculptor
Studio & Works. 6, Tything, Worcester
To Miss Bromley Martin

Madam, I beg to thank you for Cheque £3-10-0 for cutting the new Inscription.

The other items are quite apart from the estimate and which were given before and after the estimate.

I regret there should be a little misunderstand about it, I really knew nothing about cutting the old inscription deeper, until Mr Gill was at Hook, and told my son; I wrote to say that

to cut all the letters deeper, would be an expensive matter, and I should like to know his feelings on the matter, when he replied that he had sent my letter to Miss Bromley-Martin.

Yours Faithfully William Forsyth

Letter #8

Sep. 5th 1914
Studio & Works. 6, Tything, Worcester
Miss Bromley Martin

Madam, I beg to say that I quite omitted to Put the bricks into the acct. for which there were no charge made for them. My son got them from a farm close by. I therefore merely charge for his time in putting the bricks with cement etc under the memorial. I trust that my explanation re acct was satisfactory.

I am Madam Your Faithful Servant William Forsyth

2. Bromley-Martin Genealogy

George Edward Bromley-Martin (born George Edward Martin) 1829-1905 Deputy Lieutenant (D.L.), J.P., Banker Landed Proprietor & Barrister at Law, of St Clouds Powick (1871 Census and 1872 Post Office Directory), and of Ham Court (1881 Census).

Married 15.10.1862, Bayford, Hertfordshire:

Maria Henrietta Cherry 1839-1912 Daughter of Benjamin Cherry, D.L. and J.P., and Charlotte Cassandra nee Phillipotts, of Brickendon Grange.

CHILDREN:

#1 Charlotte Susan Henrietta Bromley-Martin 1864-1946.

Also buried at Hook with her sister Madeline ("two simple wooden crosses") in the 960 sq ft of burial ground reserved by her brother Eliot for 'his heirs and assigns'.

#2 (Major) Eliot George Bromley-Martin 1866-1946.

Cricketer (right-hand batsman/right-arm slow bowler) Worcestershire CC and Marylebone CC, etc.. Married Katharine Emily Rouse-Boughton-Knight, daughter of Andrew Johnes Rouse-Boughton-Knight and Eliza Severne.

#3 Madeline Frances Bromley-Martin 1866-1945.

'Madge', pupil and friend of the composer Edward Elgar. Directrice of the Hôpital Temporaire d'Arc-en-Barrois, Haute-Marne, France (1915-1919).

#4 Eleanor Mary Bromley-Martin 1869-1955.

Married Robert Martin Holland (Martin) 1872-1944 of Overby Court Tewkesbury (The Overbury Museum of Eccentricities and Bygones, and closely involved with Charles Robert Ashbee's Guild of Handicraft in London).

#5 Annora Margaret Bromley-Martin 1872-1949.

Married Hon. Victor Alexander Frederick Villiers Russell, son of Odo William Leopold Russell, 1st Baron Ampthill and Lady Emily Theresa Villiers.

3. Ham Court, Upton upon Severn

John Martin was Sheriff of Worcestershire in 1770. He died without issue in 1794 and was succeeded by his nephew the Rev. Joseph Martin of Ham Court, who died in 1828. His eldest son Joseph John Martin, who was Sheriff of Worcestershire in 1832, died without issue in 1873 and was succeeded by his nephew George Edward Martin (later George Edward Bromley-Martin), Sheriff of Worcestershire, in 1882.

– History of the County of Worcester, Volume 4

4. Church of the Good Shepherd, Hook Common, near Upton upon Severn

On Tuesday 20th September 1870, the Chapel of Ease at the Hook, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, was consecrated by the Bishop of Worcester. He preached at the morning service and, in the afternoon, the preacher was the Bishop of Exeter, Dr Frederick Temple, an old friend of the Rector, Robert Lawson. The Organising Committee for the new church included Sir Edmund Lechmere, Colonel Woodward of The Hyde, Major John Joseph Martin, the Lord of the Manor of Upton, G. E. Martin, his nephew and heir, W. Woodward and G. Osborne, who were local farmers, W. E. Cooper, the chemist, H. Cowley, the draper, F. M. Gregory and T.W. Walker, solicitors, the then curate, the Rev'd W.A. Newman, and Dr Marsh. The Rev'd Robert Lawson was the secretary. The site for the new church was given by Major Martin, by a conveyance in October 1869, "voluntarily and without any valuable consideration." There is unlikely to have been much discussion over the choice of architect: George Row Clarke had designed Upton Schools in 1858 and had quickly and efficiently produced the plans for the cemetery chapels and lodge in 1865. In 1905 Major Martin's successor as Lord of the Manor, G. E. Martin, was the first person to be buried at the Hook, where his tombstone, like the plaque to his memory in the parish church, has lettering by Eric Gill.

5. St Peter & St Paul Parish Church, Upton upon Severn

"The 'new' church in Upton was finished in 1879. Sir Arthur Blomfield drew up the plans and the site was donated by Mr G E Martin who owned the big house which was already there; this was later to become The Rectory. The church was built by Mr T. Collins from Tewkesbury at an estimated cost of £12,000 and includes "Inscription and tablets to G. E. Martin and his wife, by Eric Gill, c.1906 and c.1914."

– Nikolaus Pevsner: 'The Buildings of England, Worcestershire'

"Facing back down the church, the west window is a flood of colour. Made by Christopher Whall, it represents the creation with earth, air, fire and water. Man toils, but does not see the supporting angels. It is a memorial to George Edward Martin and so includes St George, Edward the Confessor and St. Martin. On the buttress by the font is another Martin memorial, carved by Eric Gill."

– Upton on Severn Website

6. Eric Gill

"When Eric Gill moved to Ditchling in 1907 he had already established a thriving business in cutting stone inscriptions in his workshop in Hammersmith. Gill's sculpture represented a new beginning for sculpture in Britain, because he utilised his skills as a letter cutter to revive the art of making sculpture by direct carving. When Gill made his first sculpture in 1909, most sculpture was modelled, then cast by a foundry or carved by stone masons from the artist's model. A similar return to direct carving was being pioneered at the same time in France by the Romanian sculptor Brancusi. Gill's carving technique directly influenced the work of Jacob Epstein (who came to Ditchling to learn about carving from Gill during 1910-11), and indirectly Henri Gaudier-Breska, Frank Dobson, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore. In 1911 he successfully exhibited his sculptures in London and by 1914 had been chosen for a prestigious commission: the Stations of the Cross at the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral."

– The Eric Gill Society

Eric Gill's Distributive worker community at Ditchling Common pursued a third-way economic philosophy between laissez-faire capitalism and state socialism. Distributism was formulated at the start of the 20th century by such Roman Catholic thinkers as G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc as a vehicle for the principles of Catholic Social Teaching articulated by the Roman Catholic Church, initially in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical 'Rerum Novarum' (1891). Eric Gill converted to Roman Catholicism in 1913, two years later William Forsyth did the same on his death bed.

"Gill's name was among the best-known of contemporary Catholics, for he was recognised as one of the best and most original artists of the day, whose influence was widespread and whose works were generally familiar, often causing some controversy. Best known, perhaps, to the country were his carvings of 'Prospero and Ariel' on Broadcasting House, and to Catholics the famous 'Stations of the Cross' in Westminster Cathedral"

- Catholic Herald 22.11.1940

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Memorandum
FROM W. FORSYTH, Sculptor.
STUDIO & WORKS, 6, TYTHING, WORCESTER.
TO Miss Bromley Martin
May 12th 1914

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I am Madam,
Faithfully yours
William Forsyth