

The Bell at Armed Forces Chaplaincy Centre Amport House

A 20th Century Cast Bronze Bell,

recast Christmas, 1932, by Gillett & Johnston, Croydon, with clapper,
housed in a wrought iron structure with lead roof.

(RACHD Association Property)

Valued by Coram James in 2013 at £7000.



It has the inscription:

I am the original base of the chime of 18 bells

Installed by H O Serpell, D.L. J.P.

And opened on Christmas Day, 1922

'Such wondrous power to music's given,

It elevates the soul to heaven!

Recast Christmas 1932

WESTCROFT PARK, CHOBHAM, SURREY

During the early 1900s Henry Oberlin Serpell, 1853-1943, a biscuit manufacturer for the Navy's ships biscuits, leased Westcroft Park, where he lived with Fanny Oliver, 27 years his junior, who acted as hostess in his home and was described as his cousin. His wife, Louisa Jane, with whom he had 5 children, was confined to an asylum for 30 years due to mental illness.

Henry Serpell was made High Sheriff of Surrey in 1924-5 and Deputy Lord Lieutenant for Surrey. In about 1910 he had a Clock-tower built, later with a set of 18 Carillon bells installed in 1922 made by Gillet & Johnston, then increased to 23 in number in 1932. This was the largest Carillon in England and was played for his guests by his gardener. They have now been reduced to 6 bells.

In 1938 Henry Oberlin Serpell divorced his wife Louisa on 6th July and married Fanny Oliver on 9th July at Caxton Hall, when he was aged 85. Their portrait hangs in the Worshipful Company of Barber's Hall in the City of London. He died in 1943 and left half his fortune to Fanny as well as the house. Fanny Oliver lived there as a virtual recluse until her death in 1972, when her estate was valued at £250,000 (several million in today's money).

The house has been sold twice since then and has undergone large alterations and demolition of what was a large extension. It is now sadly totally demolished, but Henry Serpell's Clock-tower remains, listed Grade II. <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1377516>

AFCC's bell was installed at Bagshot Park on 31 March 1950.

Westcroft Park, Chobham, Surrey [OS Ref. SU 953 637] In 1926, Gillett & Johnston supplied an 18-bell chime to Mr.H.O.Serpell for his estate, and in 1932 they enlarged it to 23 bells. (There are also reports of 25 or 28 bells.) After the death of its owner, this was reduced to a clock-chime, presumably of 5 bells; the disposition of the bells which were removed is unknown. Source http://www.towerbells.org/data/GB_no_more.html#CHBW

Serpells Bells—Article by John Smith

Shown below is an article from the West Chobham Parish Magazine dated February 1923 of special interest to bell ringers. It may also bring back memories, it does for me.....

—Ring Out Sweet Bells!

—Parishioners were first astonished, and then delighted, on Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, at the sound of sweet bells floating from the valley of Valley End.

—The mystery was solved by being told that Mr. H. O. Serpell, J.P. the owner of Westcroft Park had erected a tower in his park to contain a peal of bells. We have tried to get some particulars of the same, and are told the tower contains 18 bells, the total weight being about 46cwt, the tenor weighing over 9 cwt. They are played by the means of a clavier, similar to the celebrated Bruges Bells. The clock above, chimes the quarter hours on either the Westminster or the Guildford Chimes; the latter are considered the most beautiful chimes as yet produced from a musical point of view.

The architecture is somewhat of a Dutch or Elizabethan style, being built with English oak and brick, and we believe this campanile is unique, being the only one of its kind in the British Isles .

It is a great addition to the neighbourhood; it makes us feel we might be living near a cathedral city, and in the summer evenings, when sitting in our gardens, they will soothe our tired brains. Our best thanks are due to the donor. We must not dictate to Mr. Serpell, but would like to point out his park will now be an ideal place for Church and parochial gatherings, if only to hear the various selections the bells play.

—We hope now the good people of Valley End will replace their somewhat harsh Church bell, for a sweet toned one to harmonise with these .

The August edition of the magazine carries details of the individual bells in the carillon. Carillon of Bells Erected at Westcroft Park, Chobham by Gillett & Johnson, Bellfounders and Clock-makers, Croydon

—This Carillon of Bells was installed by H. O. Serpell, Esq., J. P. Christmas 1922.



Note; it is thought that in 1932 the Carillon of Bells may have been enlarged to 23 bells and after the death of its owner it was reduced to a clock chime of 5 bells.

For those not familiar with the area, Valley End is north east of West End near Windlesham.
Photograph, courtesy of Surrey Heath Museum, showing the bells in the centre of the photo

Westcroft Park, by Ken Mepham.

<https://valleyend150.wordpress.com/author/valleyend150/page/2/>

‘During my lifetime it (Westcroft Park) was owned by H. O. Serpell Esq., but my father often referred to it as Hotham’s, so presumably the name of the previous owner was Hotham. Whether or not the estate was always known as Westcroft Park, I just do not know. It was during the early 1920’s that Mr. Serpell had the place renovated, landscaped, and had the clock tower built out in the park. (I never did know just what his duties were, except that he went to Kingston-on-Thames once or twice per week. I concluded that he was some sort of senior magistrate.) He had a biscuit factory at Reading and was, I suppose, in direct competition with Huntley and Palmers who owned much of

that town. Serpells biscuits were usually a bit cheaper, and at one time they supplied Marks & Spencer with biscuits.'

Recovery of the Bell from Bagshot Park by 4 Reg RLC







Researched by David Blake (Nov 17)