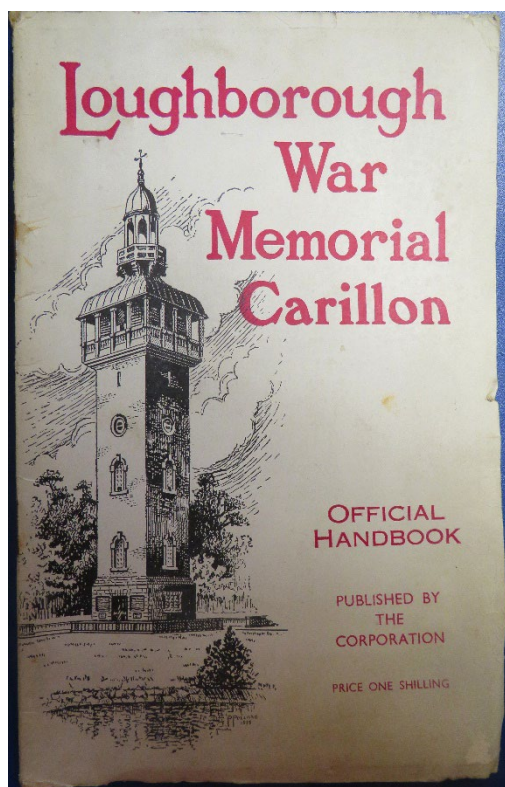


## The Loughborough Carillon – an unusual memorial by Simon Wilson

A carillon is not, as I always thought, just a bell tower. It is a musical instrument consisting of at least 23 bells fixed to a metal frame. If it has fewer bells it is known as a “chime”. They are among the heaviest musical instruments in the world and are played using a keyboard and pedals. There are around 700 carillons worldwide – mostly in Belgium and Holland – and several were built in the UK after the Great War, having been seen by soldiers serving on the Western Front. There are eight in England, five in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. There is also one in Ireland.

It is hardly surprising that Loughborough chose a carillon as a war memorial in 1919, as the town is home to John Taylor & Co, a famous bell foundry, which made bells for nine of the fifteen carillons in the UK and Ireland. Today the tower houses not only the bells, but a military museum, and plaques bearing the names of the 478 men from the town who died in the Great War. Further plaques have been added with names from later wars – 232 for WW2, two for Korea and one each for Cyprus and the Falklands. The 47 bells were donated by local people, and organisations. The largest bell was donated by the Taylors, who lost three sons in the war. Two of the bells, listed in the Official Handbook, were donated as offerings of thanks by people who survived the war.



Taylors also cast other bells as a memorial to their sons – one for Arnold is in the possession of the Royal Anglian Regiment, and a second (a memorial to all three brothers Arnold, Gerard and John) was cast for Holy Trinity Church, Loughborough. When the church closed in 1998 the bell was given to Palayamcottai Cathedral, Tamil Nadu, India.

The Carillon is situated in Queen's Park and is 152 feet tall.

One of the final fund-raising efforts was the Loughborough War Memorial Bazaar in 1923 which raised £3,711 of the final £3,000 required, enabling the War Memorial to be presented to the town free of debt.

It was a well-organised event (it would need to be, as £3,000 in 1921 equates to around £127,000 at today's values). It was well advertised, there were stories about it in the press for months before the event and there were special excursion trains laid on for visitors. To continue the memorial theme, the stalls were given names such as Bruges, Ypres, Malines and Antwerp to remind people

why they were donating. There was some comment at the time, that the returned servicemen and bereaved parents didn't necessarily want to remember the war. Sir Maurice Levy, who had been MP for Loughborough from 1900-18 was certainly of this opinion.

The choice was, it seems, a close-run thing, and one counter-proposal, a health centre had much support. The general feeling is that the council, in designing the question on the ballot paper, slanted it towards their favoured project. This was a general subject of discussion in many places after the war

– whether to spend money on memorials and parades or on the welfare of the men who came back from the war.



A team of volunteers had been working to produce items for four years, and one of the items is now known as the Alexandra Bedspread *left*, (originally known as the War Memorial Bedspread), which was made between 1920 and 1923.

It's a patchwork bedspread and, if I'm honest, it isn't very interesting, being dull in both colour and design – 510 signatures embroidered on cream cotton squares, with a central picture of the Carillon. In contrast, the story behind it is fascinating.

It was quite a sophisticated fund-raising idea, and one that you often see used today (the RNLI is currently advertising that they will put the names of benefactors on the sides of a lifeboat, for instance) – benefactors paid a shilling to have their name on the bedspread. Five hundred shillings is £25 (just over £1,000 today when adjusted for

inflation) so it worked well. They then ran a competition to guess the weight of the Carillon, with the bedspread as the prize.

Mrs Cunliffe-Stamford, who had married a Loughborough doctor in 1919 moved in Royal circles and secured the signatures of Queen Alexandra, wife of the later Edward VII, and Princess Helena, youngest daughter of Queen Victoria.

Edward Louis Spears, MP for Loughborough in 1922, had met Winston Churchill during his time on the Western Front and was able to secure Churchill's signature on one of the squares. His wife opened the



Bazaar. In 1918, he had married Mary Borden, an American heiress who volunteered as a nurse before financing her own hospital. She was a talented writer, poet and artist. One of her poems was used in 2018 at the Tower of London *Beyond the Deepening Shadow* event, and another of her poems inspired the title.

Mrs Cunliffe-Stamford is probably better known to history as Mrs Cunliffe-Owen (she remarried after the death of her first husband). The Cunliffe-Owens recruited the Sportsman's Pals Battalions (23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers) and gave each recruit a small silver medal on joining. The one illustrated *left*, is from the Royal Fusilier's Museum.





Each signature was embroidered onto the squares by local girls and the central panel, showing the Carillon, was made by students of Loughborough Technical College.

The winner of the War Memorial Bedspread, as it was then known, was James Collins, a local publican, who had the names of his family added, and the word "Owner" embroidered underneath his name.

He left it to his daughter when he died in 1937. She donated it to Charnwood Museum in 1950 but, because of the size – 8' 7" x 7' 5" – it is not on permanent display.

The opening ceremony, on Sunday 22 July 1923, was attended by 30,000 people, with 800 ex-servicemen marching in the procession. Fifty-eight people needed medical attention from the St John Ambulance Brigade, mostly for fainting brought on by the heat. The main speaker was Sir William Robertson, a Lincolnshire man who was the only man in the British Army to join as a private and rise to the rank of Field Marshall. He pointed out that occasions of this sort were not just for talking, but for thinking, and remembering not only the dead, but the survivors, who still needed help. The Bishop of Peterborough led the prayers.

The Mayor reported the cost of the memorial to be £19,000, which equated to sixteen shillings for each inhabitant of the town. Amongst the contributors were 1,750 factory girls who had donated money from their wages every week. The carillon was played by Chevalier Jef Denyn, who had travelled from Malines Cathedral in Belgium. His recital included "Memorial Chime"; a piece written specially for the occasion by Sir Edward Elgar. Elgar's original manuscript was given to the council in the 1950s, lost, and rediscovered in 2012.



A medal was struck *above*, to commemorate the opening of the War Memorial in 1923, available either in silver or in bronze. The silver one is illustrated here, though it doesn't look very silver after a hundred





years of toning. They are 23mm in diameter. The bronze medals are holed for a suspension ring and the silver ones have an integral loop for the ring. They are stamped "LATIMER/LOUGHBOROUGH" on the reverse. The silver version is additionally stamped "STERLING/SILVER".

The Latimer referred to is probably Stanley Latimer, a Loughborough jeweller with a shop at 7, Market Place (now Caffè Nero). He took over the premises in 1911 and is mentioned in the newspapers several times, unfortunately without any mention of the medallions.

The heaviest bell of the Loughborough Carillon weighs 4 tons and the lightest is 12 lbs (5 kg). There were regular concerts in the park and the Carillon was broadcast by the BBC for the first time in June 1926. Thirteen years later it was broadcast for the last time before the Second World War broke out. For the next four years no bells would be heard in the country, as they were reserved for ringing in case of invasion, but restrictions would be relaxed in 1943 when the danger of invasion had receded.



In 2018, the centenary of the end of the Great War, a further plaque was installed with the names of 114 men missing from the original memorial. Another ten people died on 31 January 1916 when a Zeppelin dropped four bombs on the town, though they seem to have escaped WW2 with just one person injured in raids. There is a brass plaque in the Carillon to commemorate the 10 Zeppelin victims, and a stone marker in the road *left*, where one of the bombs exploded. There is also another, modern, plaque pictured on various websites, but I haven't visited for a few years and haven't seen it.

