At the entrance to the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden stands a bell-tower in which a large ship’s bell is suspended. The bell is rung at 07h30, 13h10 and 16h30 to indicate time to the gardeners scattered throughout the gardens. On the tower are inscribed the words ‘This Bell Tower commemorates the work for Kirstenbosch of Lionel Phillips’, and the bell itself is engraved ‘HMS Dominion’. Who was Lionel Phillips and whence came the bell?

The man
Sir Lionel Phillips was born in London in 1855 and after an elementary education, was employed as a clerk, book-keeper, and diamond sorter. A desire to seek diamonds rather than sort them led him to the Kimberley diamond fields in 1875. There he met Cecil John Rhodes, Alfred Beit and J.B. Robinson and established a reputation for courage and integrity.

In 1885 he married Sarah Florence Ortlepp and in 1889 they moved to Johannesburg where Lionel helped to develop the gold-mining industry. He was a member of the Reform Committee and was sentenced to death for complicity in the Jameson Raid of December 1895. The death sentence was later commuted to a fine of £25 000. Lionel played an important role in the development of the Reef and was a director of numerous mining companies. In 1912 a baronetcy was conferred on him for ‘public works’.

In 1913 Sir Lionel initiated legislation which led to the formation of the Botanical Society and the establishment of Kirstenbosch Garden. He became vice-president of the society and both he and his wife served on the council. In 1917 the Phillips bought Vergelegen in Somerset West and developed the estate. Lady Phillips sponsored the botanist Rudolph Marloth in his *opus magnum, The Flora of South Africa*. She was a friend of Harry Bolus, a keen environmentalist, and a patroness of the arts. Sir Lionel died at Vergelegen on 2 July 1936.

THE KIRSTENBOSCH BELL
by C.B. Tucker, Kirstenbosch volunteer and member of the SA Ship Society

The bell-tower at the entrance to Kirstenbosch. Photo NBI, Kirstenbosch.

The Bell
HMS Dominion was one of 8 King Edward (VII) class battleships designed by Sir Frederick White. She was built by Vickers at their Barrow Yard and commissioned on 17 August 1905. The first captain was J.L. Marx (later Admiral Marx CB, MVO, DSO). Dominion was 16 350 tons, 457 ft long and had a complement of 777 men. A maximum speed of 19.3 knots was achieved using two sets of four cylinder triple-expansion engines driving two propellers.

The armaments were formidable: four 12-inch guns (twinned in turrets fore and aft), four 9.2-inch guns (single in turrets broadsides), ten 6-inch guns (fore, aft and broadsides), fourteen 12-pounders, fourteen 3-pounders, two Maxim guns and five 18-inch torpedo tubes (all submerged, four broadside and one at the stern).

The ship was attached to the Grand Fleet in the Third Battle Squadron during the First World War and in 1917 became a depot ship. The vessel was paid-off on 9 May 1921 and scrapped in 1924.

The King Edward class ships had names associated with the British Empire and were known as the Wobbly Eight because of their propensity to roll. They were HMS Africa (for South Africa), HMS Britannia (for Britain), HMS Commonwealth (for Australia), HMS Dominion (for Canada), HMS Hibernia (for Ireland), HMS Hindustan (for India), HMS Zealandia (for New Zealand) and HMS King Edward (for the reigning monarch).

The link
The bell from HMS Dominion was given to Sir Lionel Phillips by a friend, Geoffrey Blake RN, who had been the first gunnery officer aboard Dominion in 1905. It is not known how this item came about but it is known that in 1911 Geoffrey Blake married the daughter of William St John Carr, first mayor of Johannesburg and a pioneer associate of Sir Lionel during their political and mining ventures. Commander Blake (later Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Blake KCB, CB, DSO) probably purchased the bell from the Admiralty when the ship was paid-off.

The bell was hung outside the wine cellars at Vergelegen and then outside the Library on the estate. It was tolled when Sir Lionel died in 1936. In 1938 Lady Phillips donated the bell to Kirstenbosch and it became part of the commemorative tower which was designed by Cwelo Goodman, a painter/architect and friend of the Phillips. The tower was inaugurated at a ceremony on 27 April 1938 by Sir James Rose-Innes, President of the Botanical Society. Lady Phillips tolled the bell three times and expressed her appreciation of the project.

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Further Reading