

Biographical Record

Canon Kenneth Walter Harry FELSTEAD (1914 - 1994)

Represented the Winchester and Portsmouth Diocesan Guild on the Central Council from 1946 -1972, was an Honorary Member from 1972 - 1986, attended 34 meetings.

Kenneth Walter Harry Felstead was born on 3rd March 1914 at Beighton, Derbyshire. He was educated at Chesterfield Grammar School and Sheffield University where he graduated in 1935 in General Science, and later with an MSc in Geology. He trained for the ministry at Lichfield Theological College and was ordained deacon in 1937 and priest in 1938, both at Derby Cathedral. He served his curacy at St John's, Long Eaton from 1937-39, where he met Sylvia Musson whom he married in 1940. They had two daughters, Sylvia and Elizabeth, neither of whom learned to ring.

In 1939 Kenneth was appointed as Chaplain and Lecturer in Mathematics at King Alfred's College, Winchester, but the outbreak of war caused the college to be taken over by HM forces. Unable through health reasons to serve in the forces, Kenneth looked after the parish of Weston, Hants until his appointment in 1946 to St Michael's Southampton. He was made an honorary Canon of Winchester Cathedral in 1962. In 1970 he was appointed Master of St Cross Hospital, Winchester and held this living until his retirement in 1979, when he was made Canon Emeritus. Thereafter he lived at Warminster, Wilts and latterly at Goring, Oxon where he died on 26 February 1994. As well as his duties as a parish priest, Kenneth had spells both on Convocation (the forerunner of General Synod) and as a Church Commissioner.

Kenneth learned to ring at Beighton around 1934. At Sheffield University his interest in change-ringing was kindled through his friendship with Paul Taylor. When the ban on ringing was lifted in 1943 Kenneth was able to develop his ringing skills, and he rang his first peal on Easter Monday 1945. Further progress was brought about by the move of Charles Kippin to Southampton, their combined enthusiasm resulting in the augmentation of St Michael's bells from 8 to 10 and the development of a first-class Surprise Royal band. Many of Kenneth's peals took place there; in all he rang just under 100 peals, including the first Clerical peal of Royal, at Magdalen College, Oxford on 18 April 1969. He was Master of the Winchester & Portsmouth Diocesan Guild from 1962 to 1968.

Kenneth was a Central Council representative for the Winchester & Portsmouth Diocesan Guild from 1946 to 1972 and an honorary member from then until 1984. He was an active member of Council and served on the Methods Committee from 1948 to 1963 and the Peals Analysis Committee from 1954 to 1984; in both cases his incisive intellect enabled him to make valuable contributions. As convener of the Methods Committee from 1948 to 1961 he was also ex officio a member of the Standing Committee. His experience of the higher echelons of the Church of England also made him a valuable member of the Redundant Bells Committee from 1973 to 1981: this also made him ex officio an administrator of the Rescue Fund for Redundant Bells from its formation in 1979.

Kenneth's most lasting contribution to the work of the Council, and to ringing generally, is his catalogue of peals rung at each tower. This immense work, which he started in the mid 1950s initially covered only towers in the Winchester & Portsmouth Guild area, but he later extended it to include all towers in the British Isles and the rest of the world. The database, recorded on cards, was bequeathed to the Council on Kenneth's death and has since been converted to an on-line computer database, accessible at www.cccbr.org.uk/felstead/.

Tributes appeared in The Ringing World 1994 on pages 220 & 333.

A more extensive obituary to Kenneth, which contains more detail about the origins and development of the database can be found at www.cccbr.org.uk/felstead/biography.html

