

## Prolific Peal Ringers

### 14: JAMES BENNETT (1887-1973)



James Bennett was born in Ashbocking, Suffolk near Ipswich in 1887. Ashbocking was a two-bell tower at the time, one of which was cracked and it was not until late 1904 that Taylor's recast the tenor and added four more bells. James learned to ring here, along with his brother George but James had only reached a Grandsire Doubles stage by his eighteenth birthday when he joined the Royal Marines. This

was in May 1905 and from then until 1911 he had few opportunities to ring and virtually gave up. In that year he moved to Chatham and George persuaded him to take up ringing again. He did, and became attached to the band of St Mary's, Chatham, remaining a member of this tower until he left the Service on May 8, 1926.

It is in this area where he started to build up his reputation as a peal ringer and as a martinet and strict disciplinarian in the belfry. Even when crippled with arthritis in later life he would never arrive late and his suit and boots were always prepared, as one writer put it, "in the grand manner of a colour sergeant in 'The Service' as he called it."

An early peal of his was his first of Bob Major, which he rang at Sittingbourne on October 9, 1912. This was composed and conducted by Frederick A Holden, who was a fellow Marine. They both rang in another peal of Bob Major on January 8, 1914, which was the first peal to be rung by a complete band of servicemen from the army, navy and marines.

In 1971 he wrote some reminiscences for *The Ringing World* in which he mentioned that during WWI he spent five years and eleven days on one ship and, that as a gunnery observer, he laid the range for the opening salvo at the Battle of Jutland.

On leaving *The Service* he became a bank courier in the City of London, so he left the band at Chatham and transferred to the band at St Martin-in-the-Fields, having been elected a member of the Society of Cumberland Youths whilst on active service during the war. It was in this period he did most of his peal ringing.

In 1929 he joined the band of St Mary, Lewisham and spent twenty-four years as a

member of their company. Whilst he was here he rang his 1000th peal, one of Stedman Triples at Crayford on July 24, 1943, conducted by C T Coles. This peal was rung in memory of Tom Coles' son who had been killed in action. It was also Tom Coles' 1000th peal; the first time two ringers had reached this number together.

Of his 1000 peals he had conducted 88 of them, ringing them for 32 associations in 47 counties of England, Wales and Ireland in 314 towers. He rang a tower-bell peal on everyday of the year – including February 29; peals in every English county; 29 towers circled to peals. His most popular method was Stedman (Triples to Cinques) 222, conducted 4; Cambridge (Major to Maximus) 197 conducted 8.

In 1952 he retired to his native Suffolk and spent the remainder of his life at Grundisburgh. He enjoyed travel: he made two "round the world" trips, one each way, and had tours of Australia, Africa, Canada and the USA. He wrote some reminiscences of some of these for *The Ringing World*, describing them as:

*"a tour of Australia and Canada by coach, car, train, tram, bus, boat and shank's pony"*.

On August 9, 1973 Jim Bennett died at his home in Grundisburgh, aged 86, leaving a nephew, James. His health had been failing for some years. He had kept meticulous records of all his peals, but his will required that after his death "all my ringing books shall be destroyed". His wishes were carried out.

#### References

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