

Prolific Peal Ringers

27: JOSEPH WILLIAM COTTON (1902-1985)



Joseph William Cotton was born on December 15, 1902 at Netherseale, in Derbyshire. He lived in this locality all his life and, at the end of the World War I, was a member of the nearby church of St Matthew, Overseale. The parishioners, in memory of those who had fallen during the war decided to install a new ring of eight bells and these were installed and dedicated on December

13, 1919. Joe Cotton was one of the group of seven young men who volunteered to learn to ring these bells. Their initial tuition was at Netherseale and within eleven months they were ready and on November 2, 1920 they rang a peal of Grandsire Doubles with three covers at Overseale. Ron Dove, recalling memories of this peal half a century later, commented that the conductor, William Clayfield, was the only member of the band not ringing his first peal but he still used the old dodge of remembering the number of 120s he had called by dropping a penny on the floor after each one!

In Joe's early ringing days there were few chances to make progress. In fact, the prevailing attitude was "that 18 was a bit on the young side to learn to ring." So, although he rang his first peal of Grandsire Triples three years later, conducted by the redoubtable Maurice Swinfield, it was not until a district meeting about 1927 when he had the opportunity to ring his first course of Stedman Triples. He conducted his first peal, Grandsire Doubles at Netherseale in 1927 and his first of Triples at Overseale in 1932. It took him fourteen years to score his first fifty peals.

His activities were not confined to ringing. At Overseale he served as verger and parish clerk as well as the more usual sidesman and member of the PCC. In 1946, when the diocesan boundaries changed and the Midland Counties Association was split up, Joe became the Secretary of the Midland Counties Guild that replaced the Burton-on-Trent District of that Association. He remained the secretary until 1977 when he became a Vice-President. He also represented them on the Central Council from 1946 to 1977, attending 27 meetings.

Joe rang his 1000th peal at Overseale on October 6, 1964. The article spoke of "his unflagging zeal in arranging peals of an advanced standard in an area not easily accessible from the

main ringing centres", and how this had benefited many young ringers in the area. It is interesting to note that of the eight ringers in Joe's peal of Overseale Surprise Major that five of them later rang over one thousand peals.

During the next twenty years, Joe continued with his peal ringing. His final total was 1,554, conducted 57. He was very proud of his three peals of London Surprise Major in one day and also of ringing the Surprise Royal Alphabet. After sixty-five years a ringer at Overseale, he died on March 21, 1985 aged 82 and was buried in the village. This picture was taken in 1972 to mark his 25 years as Secretary of the Midland County Guild.



References

Ringing World 1964/710, 775 1972/431 1985/316, 426