

Prolific Peal Ringers

18: GEORGE ERNEST FEARN (1906-1974)



George Fearn was born on July 26, 1906 in Birmingham but didn't get involved with bells and ringing until he reached the age of 21, at which point he joined his younger brother Henry who was being taught to ring by John Neal at St John's church, Deritend. The bells here were a poor lot and when the church was demolished the bells were recast by Taylor's and rehung in Bishop Latimer's church at Handsworth. The two brothers visited other towers, going regularly to Bromsgrove and also to Belbroughton in Worcestershire. George bought a small

motorcycle that enabled them to travel to more distant towers but, after it was stolen and not recovered, they used push-bikes.

After ringing finished at Deritend, George and Henry transferred to Harborne and in the early 1930s to Kings Norton. They rang for alternate Sunday morning services only and that enabled them to go to St Martin's every other Sunday, thus starting their long association with that tower. Albert Walker nominated George his successor as tower warden and conductor in 1961.

In 1937 St Philip's Cathedral bells were recast and George was made ringing master. So started the many, many hours he spent in this belfry, not only in ringing but in oiling fittings, splicing ropes and other maintenance.

He started work in 1920 for the City of Birmingham Electricity Supply department and worked for over thirty years at Dale End, one of the first power stations constructed in this country. The Central Electricity Generating Board was its successor and he retired from full-time work in 1966.

By early 1928 George was in the habit of ringing every night, cycling ten to fifteen miles each way to different practices. His first peal was on December 26, 1928 and was one of Grandsire Doubles at Stone, Worcestershire, conducted by Ernest Calcutt. It was the first peal by the entire band. Three followed in the next year and then he averaged about fifteen a year till the war started. It was 1948 when he really got going again and started ringing over a hundred peals every year! He became the youngest person to ring a thousand peals on September 2, 1953 when he rang a peal of Yorkshire Surprise Major at Netherton, Worcs

whilst on the Midland Counties Peal Tour. He had conducted 226 of the peals and three had been non-conducted.

His 2000th peal was on February 25, 1965, Superlative Surprise Maximus at St Philip's Cathedral, where he had rung approximately 450 of his peals. His 2,500th was one of Londinium Surprise Maximus at St Martin's Church on July 4, 1972, and his last and 2,667th peal was Bristol Surprise Maximus at St Philip's Cathedral on May 16, 1974. Fifty-nine of these were on handbells, two of which he conducted and he also called 324 of his tower bell peals. The list is an impressive and brilliant one but what of the man?

Friends of his early days tended to stress his generosity to them in the dark days of the depression; his excellent sense of humour; his good common sense and wealth of experience. There were stories of his bike; his work as Guild secretary for twenty years; his years of training bands and teaching beginners; his ringing weeks; his work for the Robin Hood Smallholders' Association and other keen gardeners. He represented the St Martin's Guild on the Central Council from 1954 until 1974.

He died on Monday May 20, 1974 and his funeral was four days later at the Robin Hood Cemetery, Solihull. A memorial service was held for him at St Philip's Cathedral on June 7 taken by the Precentor, Rev'd David McInnes with more than 200 present.

References

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