

## Prolific Peal Ringers

### 12: WILLIAM HERBERT FUSSELL (1861-1944)



William Herbert Fussell was born at Upton-cum-Chalvey, near Slough on September 16, 1861. His older brother, Alf, was the direct cause of his brother, Bill, becoming a ringer. Alf was a painter and decorator who, whilst discussing some business, was asked if he could illuminate a memorial board for Slough belfry recording some past ringers. This he did and, in doing so, learned to ring himself, married the tower captain's daughter and introduced his younger brother into the ringing chamber in 1874.

Bill, as he was generally known, was a shrewd observer with a strong sense of humour. He was clever at recording these observations, and, besides his many articles for the *Bell News* and *Ringing World*, he left ten small notebooks that present a vivid picture of a ringer's life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He describes how, when he started ringing as a 13 year-old boy, it was all chiming and call-changes, the foreman calling the changes from a course of Grandsire written out on a stout roll of paper that was balanced on a chair in front of him.

His moves towards change ringing were slow. In 1874 the West Middlesex Association was founded, the Revd C T Mayo, Vicar of St Andrew, Hillingdon, being the moving force. Their instructor was William Baron, a prominent

member of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths and, under his guidance, the Slough ringers began to ring Grandsire Triples. Another association with Maidenhead as its centre was set up to cover the area of East Berkshire and West Buckinghamshire and was formally established in 1879, greatly improving ringing opportunities in the area.

Bill tried to get as much practice as he could. He had been one of the founder members of the new Oxford Diocesan Guild that had been established at Reading on January 17, 1881 and had made some new friends and acquaintances in the Reading area and, although opportunities for peals did not arise very often, he was invited into one of Grandsire Triples over Easter, 1882 at Bicester.

On Saturday, April 8, 1882 he walked the 38 miles from Slough to Oxford, rested up and the following morning walked the remaining 15 miles or so miles to Bicester. They rang Holt's Ten-part peal, conducted by Charles Hounslow. In the band also was an eighteen-year-old James Washbrook: in his case it was his third peal for the Guild. The peal was never published in the *Bell News* but a copy was printed in the Oxford Diocesan Guild report for 1882.

Over the next sixty years his peal total slowly advanced. He had joined the Society of Cumberland Youths in 1881 and enjoyed ringing with them in London when available. His first one hundred peals were mainly Grandsire Triples, some perhaps rung whilst acting as a Guild instructor. For instance, over a period of eight years in the 1880-90s he spent a lot of time in the Hereford Diocese visiting towers and teaching change-ringing. He was one of the most travelled ringers of the 19th century. Perhaps as a result, he became the first man to ring a peal in every county of England and Wales.

He not only enjoyed travelling but also organising and he distinguished himself not only in the summer holiday tours he arranged but also those further afield to other countries including the first tour of Australia. In 1934 Melbourne was celebrating its centenary and it issued an invitation to the people of the Empire to join in the festivities. Fussell organised the ringing tour to coincide with this. John Goldsmith, the editor of *The Ringing World*, who also went on the tour, wrote a book about it afterwards calling it *A Great Adventure*.

Fussell was clever at sketching: the *Bell News* printed a number of articles he wrote and illustrated: a typical example is his sketch of Arklow ringing chamber where Washbrook had rung the first double-handed peal. He rang his 1000th peal on Thursday, September 13, 1934, the day before sailing to Australia. He rang a total of 1151 peals of which 7 were on handbells. He conducted only 21 peals but he rang them in 548 towers, a record for the time.

He died at Farnham Royal on September 1, 1944, just fifteen days short of his eighty-third birthday. He was a bachelor, and after the funeral his landlady was at a loss to know what to do with the shabby looking books that took up a large part of his room. She piled them in the garden and was going to make a bonfire of them but for the timely intervention of one of the Slough ringers who was able to rescue the diaries mentioned earlier, twenty roughly bound volumes of the *Bell News*, a number of volumes in the *Church Bells* category such as *The Church Bells of Norfolk*, and copies of *Bannister, Hubbard, Thackrah* and one of the only four existing copies of *Tintinnalogia!*

One ringing anecdote exists illustrating the sibling rivalry between Bill and his older brother Alf. They had met for a local peal of Grandsire Triples at Slough and were deciding who should conduct it. Bill said that he should, as Alf had called the last one so it was his turn. Alf retorted that he wasn't sure that Bill was right, but in any case, he was the elder, so he was going to call it. The peal began with Alf calling Parker's Twelve-Part and all went well until the 5039th change when Bill stood his bell at backstroke and remarked; "You know, I think it really was my turn to conduct!"

#### References

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