

Prolific Peal Ringers

29: WILFRID FARRINGTON MORETON (1924-2006)



Wilfrid F Moreton, or “Wilf”, as he was generally known, was the second of the four children born to Harold and Anne Moreton of Flamborough, East Riding of Yorkshire, on July 31, 1924. Harold Moreton was vicar of Flamborough and when Wilf was eight moved with his family to Pencombe, near Bromyard in Herefordshire. A little later he became a residentiary Canon at the Cathedral and they moved into the cathedral close.

Wilf was educated in the cathedral school and during 1936 also learned to ring at All Saints, Hereford, taught by Charles L Sadler. Ernest Salmons conducted his first peal, which was one of Grandsire Triples, at Holme Lacy on April 15, 1939.

Wilf conducted his first peal just three months later at the age of fourteen, one of Grandsire Triples from the treble at Burghill. He used to tell the story of how he did this by counting the number of leads between each of the bobs! He went up to Oxford in 1942 but was sent home after two months to await his call-up but used this brief period to teach his brother and sister, Michael and Sheila, how to handle a bell!

He served in the East Riding Yeomanry and became a Captain in the Armoured Tank Division. He seldom spoke of his war experiences except to say that whilst in Belgium he climbed lots of bell-towers! He was posted to India after the European war ended and managed to ring three peals on

hand bells there, one each for the Oxford University Society, the Scottish Association and the Hereford Diocesan Guild.

In 1946 he came out of the army and returned to St John’s College, Oxford. A lot of peals followed, and after two years he decided, perhaps through the effect of the war or perhaps too much ringing, to leave Oxford and finish his degree at the University College of Wales. After a teacher’s training course at Birmingham he accepted the post of Divinity Master at Normanton Grammar School, a post he retained all his working life, retiring as Deputy Head in 1984. He met Jo Roper on a UA Tour and they married on Easter Monday, 1958 at Adderbury, Oxon. They had three children, Adrian, Ralph and Frances. All learned to ring, and one of Wilf’s proudest moments was a Sunday Service peal of Plain Bob Royal in which all his children rang.

“Jafus” made him the subject of Servants of the Exercise – No 47 and described him as one of the most brilliant members of the younger generation of the Exercise. He commented that he was a born teacher and never as happy as when he was teaching beginners. He was elected a member of the Central Council in 1947 as a representative of the Hereford Diocesan Guild; became an Honorary member in 1960 and represented Yorkshire from 1963 until 1988, when he was made a life member.

It was perhaps through his Central Council work that so many ringers got to know Wilfrid Moreton and respect his knowledge and skills. He served on the Sunday Service Committee, later the Education Committee, which developed the idea that territorial guilds and associations should arrange ringing courses. In 1963 he was asked to organise one and, as he knew the area around Hereford that was where he arranged it! It has remained there ever since and his name is synonymous with the Hereford Course.

He completed his first one thousand peals with one of seven Minor at Holy Trinity, Darlington on September 23, 1967. About 250 of these had been for the Hereford Guild and many of them had been rung with Leslie Evans, George Cousins, Austin Wingate and his brother Michael. He conducted over half. (539)

Notable peals include the first of Glasgow Surprise Major, Frinsbury, 1946; the first in 25 Spliced Surprise Major, Dorchester, Oxon, 1951; conducted five peals in a day at Llanfihangel Rhydithon on April 15, 1952; the first of 53 Spliced Surprise Major, Conisbrough, South Yorks June 24, 1955 (a completely different band from the Dorchester peal!); 130 Minor Methods on handbells, 1961; 42 Surprise Royal, Rotherham, 1965; Pitman’s 9-Spliced Surprise Major, silent and non-conducted.. He was also one

of the ten men invited to Washington Cathedral in 1964 to open the new ring of bells and ring a peal of Stedman Caters. His final peal total was 1064 on tower bells and exactly 300 on handbells. Of these he conducted 871 or 604 on tower bells and 267 in hand. Most of his peals were for the Yorkshire Association, total 654, 454 conducted.

In 1964 he replaced Mr Leslie W G Morris as secretary to the Yorkshire Association, a post in which he did an excellent job until 1971 when he asked to retire. This may have been due to the pressure of a young family and the commitment the post had on Saturdays.

During 1976 Wilfrid was made aware that he was subject to the illness, multiple sclerosis. He carried on virtually as normal. He was Chairman of the Central Council Education committee and wrote a number of the pamphlets including one of the two parts of *The Tutor’s Handbook*; *Conducting Stedman Triples*; *An introduction to Method Construction* and several others.

With the course of time tower bell ringing became more difficult. He experimented with occasional peals on tiny sets of hand bells but eventually this became impossible and ill-health eventually robbed him of the ability to take an active part in the ringing Exercise that he loved so much and taught so well. In 1984 he was elected President of the Yorkshire Association, a post he retained until 1990. In 1997 he was awarded the MBE for “Services to Bell Ringing”; an award he richly deserved but preferred others not to know about!

To near the end he retained his keen interest in all things to do with ringing and would offer help and guidance if others had problems. The regard in which he was held by his fellow ringers may be measured by this quote from a tribute in *The Ringing World*:

“.....he was one of the finest ringers ever, an excellent striker, marvellous conductor and a good ringer of both tower and hand bells and a wonderful friend. He had a great sense of humour and enjoyed “fun”. He was a selfless man as evidenced when calling a peal and as a conductor, if things were going astray, he would occasionally “miscall” the peal and take the blame on himself for the failure rather than single out someone else”.

He died in Pinderfields Hospital in the early hours of Monday, November 13, 2006 aged 82 and, at his request, details of his death and the funeral were kept private until after the funeral had taken place a week later.

RIP.

References

Ringing World 1939/262; 1954/153; 1958/253; 1960/769; 1967/718, 742, 752; 1971/476; 1982/715; 1994/875; 1997/648; 2002/1131, 1176; 2006/1119, 1140, 1174; 2007/35, 47-8, 129