

Prolific Peal Ringers

16: ERNEST MORRIS (1889-1962)



Ernest Morris was born on July 23, 1889, son of Josiah Morris and brother of George Stedman Morris. Josiah was the verger and a ringer of St Margaret's, Leicester, so it was inevitable that his sons would be ringers and, as he was known as "The Rhythm King", they would be good ringers. Josiah's motto was that, "There are only two kinds of ringers, graceful and disgraceful!"

Ernest had only an elementary education and left school at 14, going to work in a leather factory. In later life, when speaking about his early years, he always said he was self-educated.

He started ringing in 1902 and his first peal was on August 6, 1906. The method was Grandsire Triples, rung at St James, Grimsby, Lincs. His father rang in this peal as well as many others in future years.

By the end of 1912 he had rung fifty peals, just over half of which were Minor and Grandsire Triples. Amongst these were a 10,080 of Minor, rung at Ratby, Leics and a 6240 of Double Norwich Court Bob Major. It was also in 1912 that he published the first of his works, a slim volume on the history of the church of St Margaret's, Leicester.

On July 25, 1914 he married Miss Edith Goodman at St Margaret's, Leicester. A large number of ringing friends attended the wedding and celebrated the occasion by ringing the bride and groom out and continuing to ring all the afternoon as well!

It was not until after the War was over that he came to the fore in ringing. He returned from overseas and took up peal ringing and soon was ringing with some of those whose names were by-words in ringing circles. He rang Stedman Caters on the old bells at Manchester Town Hall, conducted by James Washbrook in 1921 and Cambridge Maximus with William Pye at Southwark and St Mary-le-Bow.

He enjoyed record lengths, for instance; the 12,663 Stedman Cinques at Oxford Cathedral in 1946; 13,440 Plain Bob Major at the Loughborough Bell Foundry; 12,896 Cambridge Surprise Major at Stoney Stanton in 1923; 9,999 Stedman Caters on handbells in 1948 and a number of others. He also gained great enjoyment through helping a five-bell tower to ring a peal of Doubles or someone to ring their first peal of Minor or Triples.

He rang his 1000th peal on August 28, 1947, one of Stedman Cinques on handbells, his father,

Josiah, also taking part. He was the sixteenth ringer to achieve this ambition. He became the first ringer to achieve 2000 peals on February 27, 1961 with a peal of Morryston Surprise Royal at Loughborough Bell Foundry. He rang 1729 tower bell peals, conducting 654 of them and 356 handbell peals, conducting 20. His total was 2085 (674) of which 9 compositions proved false.

He helped others through his Guild work. He was the Honorary General Secretary of the Midland Counties Association for 21 years, from 1925-46; Vice-President of the Leicester Guild from 1946-48 and Honorary Treasurer from 1959-62. He was also their representative on the Central Council from 1960-62 and attended 2 meetings

Ernest Morris achieved fame as an author of books on bells. He wrote *A History and Art of Change Ringing*, first published in 1930; *Legends of the Bells*; *Bells of All Nations*; *Towers and Bells of Britain*; *Tintinnabula*. He also wrote long series of articles on; *Chimes and Chime Tunes*; *Bells in English Life*; *Ringers Jugs, Pitchers and Gotchers*; and *Bells and Bellfounding in Leicestershire* for *The Victoria History of England*.

He unexpectedly died on April 21, 1962, aged 72. He was recovering from an operation on Good Friday in Leicester Royal Infirmary but suddenly passed away.

References

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